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AG

T H E  
RATIONAL FOUNDATION  
O F A  
Christian Church,

And the TERMS of  
CHRISTIAN COMMUNION.

To which are added

THREE DISCOURSES,

V I Z.

DISC. I. A Pattern for a DISSENTING  
PREACHER.

DISC. II. The Office of DEACONS.

DISC. III. Invitations to CHURCH-FEL-  
LOWSHIP.

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BY  
ISAAC WATTS, D. D.

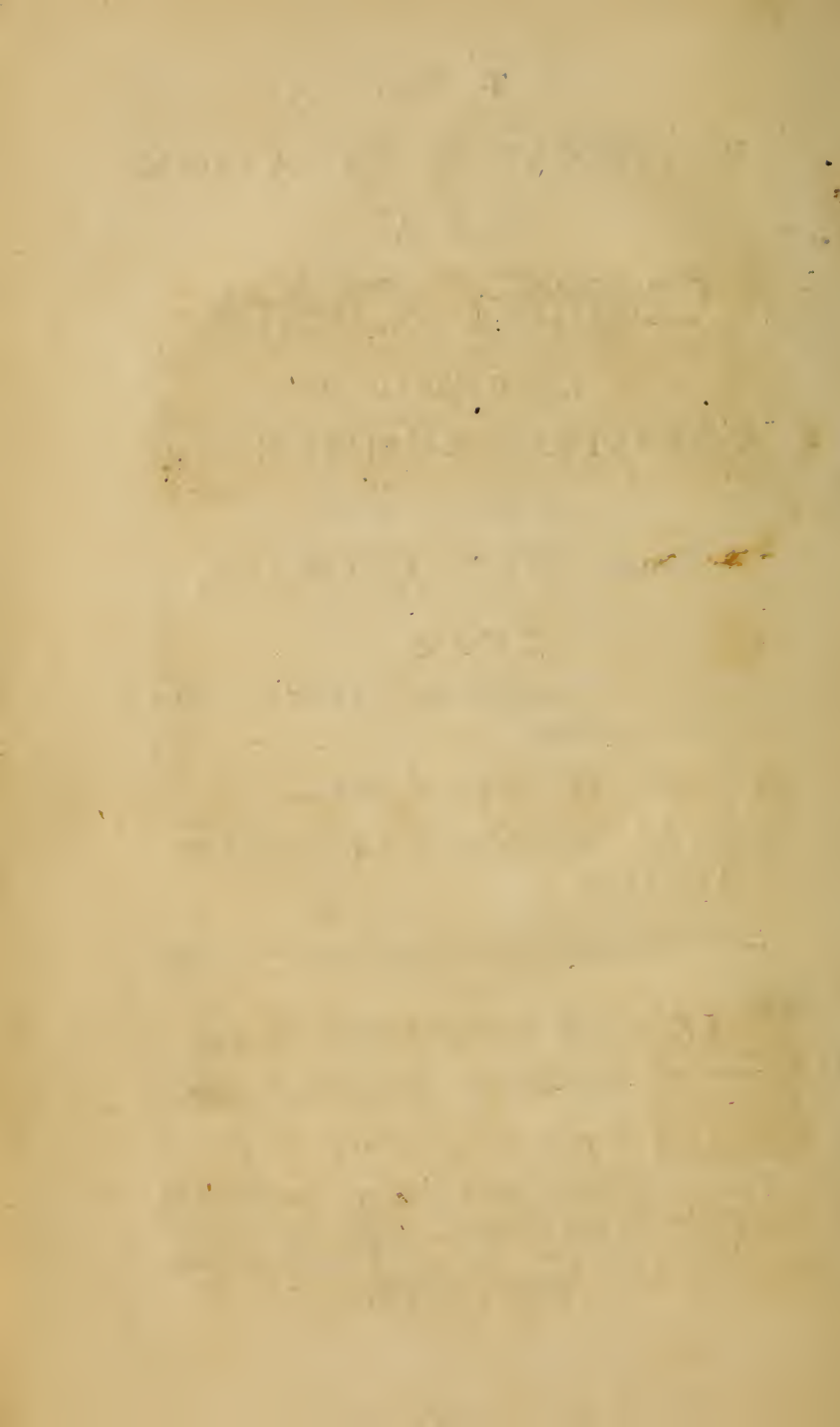
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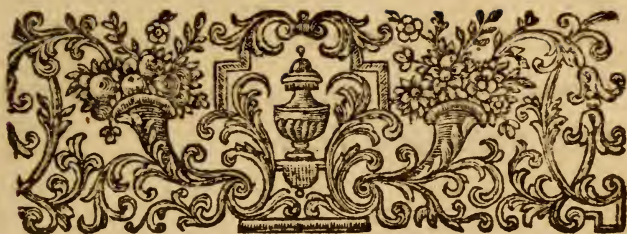
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L O N D O N:

Printed for JOHN OSWALD, at the *Rose* and  
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MDCCXLVII.





T H E

# P R E F A C E.



*THE Principles on which  
Christian Churches are  
built, are so plain, so na-  
tural and easy, and so  
much the same with those which give  
Rise to all the well-formed Societies*

## The P R E F A C E.

*in the World, that one would think there should not be such Matter of Debate and Controversy among Christians, upon these Subjects, as we have unhappily found.*

*For besides the Reasonableness of the Things that are required for this Purpose, our blessed Saviour himself has given us so many Promises in his Word to favour this Practice of holy Fellowship, and to encourage our Hope, as give abundant Reason to our Expectations of divine Success. Has he not told us, that where two or three are met together in his Name, there he is, or will be in the Midst of them? And when St. Peter made a glorious Confession of his Faith in Jesus the Son of God, the promised Saviour; upon this Rock, said he, will I build my Church, and*

## *The* P R E F A C E.

and the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.

*So that if there is found but such Faithfulness, such Christian Virtues of Meekness, Patience and Forbearance, as may be justly expected among Christians, I would hope such Settlements as these might continue without Interruption. And I trust I have here represented these Things so faithfully, so plainly and clearly, that no single Person, in any Part of his Practice, will find his Conscience imposed upon by any Article or Canon here mentioned; nor will any Society find itself obliged to do any Thing in receiving, continuing, or excluding any Persons from their Church, but what lies natural and easy before the Minds of Persons, who do but exercise the common Rea-*



## *The* P R E F A C E.

*son by which they conduct themselves  
in the Affairs of human Life.*

*Nor is there any Thing here asserted, which confines Christians to so exact a Uniformity in their Principles and Practices, but by the Exercise of their Reason, with a small Degree of Charity, they may make and allow such Alterations, as will assist and promote the general Peace and Edification of the Churches, under the Care and Patronage of Jesus the great Shepherd.*

*And upon these Foundations, if the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and his Spirit, which is promised to assist the Christian Church, does but continue among his Ordinances, from Time to Time, we may hope to find a  
comforta-*



## *The* P R E F A C E.

*comfortable Succession and increase of Members added to the Church, and built up in Faith, Love and Holiness, till our Lord Jesus Christ himself shall return to this World, and finish the great and important Work of Judgement.*

*I would only add further, with Regard more especially to the Questions relating to Christian Communion, that if any Thing contained in them may be effectual through the divine Blessing, to set the Terms of Christian-Fellowship in a juster Light, to secure the great and necessary Principles of Christianity, to remove any Causes of Offence from among the Churches, and to lead the several Parties of Christians, to more moderate and charitable Sentiments concerning*

# *The* P R E F A C E.

*cerning each other, I shall have abundant Reason to rejoice in my Attempt, and give Glory to the God of Truth and Peace.*

Stoke Newington,  
March 25, 1747.



T H E



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*The Officers answered, Never Man spake like this Man.* p. 289.

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*For they that have used the Office of a Deacon well, purchase to themselves a good Degree, and great Boldness in the Faith which is in Christ Jesus.* p. 323.

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*Blessed is the Man whom thou chusest, and  
causest to approach unto thee, that he may  
dwell in thy Courts; we shall be satis-  
fied with the Goodness of thy House, even of  
thy Holy Temple.*

P. 347.



THE CONSTITUTION

OF THE UNITED STATES

OF AMERICA

AND

THE HISTORY OF THE CONSTITUTION  
OF THE UNITED STATES  
OF AMERICA  
FROM 1776 TO 1787  
BY  
JAMES MADISON  
OF VIRGINIA  
AND  
GEO. W. FOSTER  
OF NEW YORK  
NEW YORK  
1862

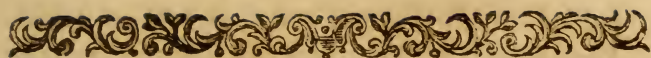
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# ERRATA.

PAGE 6. l. the last, after *Reason*, r. *could*. p. 79.  
l. 19. for *should*, r. *could*. p. 96. l. 27. for *Con-*  
*stitutions*, r. *Contentions*.

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THE



THE  
RATIONAL FOUNDATION, FORM,  
and ORDER,  
OF A  
CHRISTIAN CHURCH,  
Confirmed and Improved :  
BY THE  
Directions and Examples of the NEW  
TESTAMENT.

---

S E C T. I.

*Reason and Revelation agree to require  
social Religion.*

I.



A N is an intellectual and sociable Being, and he owes Honour and Worship to God his Creator, in his *social* as well as his *single* Capacity : He owes also Assistance to his Fellow-Creatures, in the Affairs of Religion, as well

as in those of the Natural and Civil Life. *Social Religion* is therefore the Duty of every Man, where he can meet with such Fellow-Worshippers, as to lay a Foundation for amicable Union in the same Acts of Worship, and for mutual Help in religious Concerns: And these three following *Reasons*, among others, oblige him to it.

(1.) As he is bound to express to God *in secret*, and *alone*, what Sense he has of the Divine Being, Attributes, and Government, so he is obliged to join *with others*, and *publickly* to declare to the World, what an awful and honourable Apprehension he has of the same Things: And this, that he may do Honour to God amongst Men, or glorify his Name amongst his Fellow-Creatures; which secret Religion cannot do. This is the chief End *with Regard to God*, for which Man's very Nature is made sociable, and for which he is constituted by Providence in human Society. This is the first Spring, and the perpetual Foundation, of all social and publick Religion: For this End, social Honours paid to God shall be everlasting. This is practised in the Society of holy Angels, those *Sons of God*, who *sang together, and shouted for Joy, when the Foundations of the Earth were laid*; and who met together at certain Seasons, *to present themselves before God*. Job xxxviii. 7. and i. 6. and ii. 1. This is required in our World of sinful Men; so it will

will be, doubtless, in the World of separate Spirits, who are described as a *Church*, or religious Assembly. *Heb. xii. 13.* And so in the World of the Resurrection, when the high Praises of God and the Lamb shall be for ever on their Tongues.

(2.) Man, in his *single* Capacity, is obliged to perform Acts of secret Religion to God, because, in that Capacity, he wants many Favours from God ; such as Health, Safety, Food, Raiment, &c. He is always receiving some of these Favours, and always waiting for more. And so also every Man, in his *social* Capacity, for the same Reason, is under Obligation to perform Acts of publick or social Religion ; (*viz.*) Prayer for publick Mercies wanted, such as good Governors, Peace, Plenty, Civil and Religious Liberty, &c. Praise for publick Mercies received, and a Profession of his Hope of publick Blessings, which he expects at the Hands of God. If there were no other Reasons for *social Religion* to be found, yet I think the Obligation of it would stand firm upon these two Pillars. But I add,

(3.) It is a necessary and most effectual Means of maintaining Religion in this our World. Several Persons, with united Zeal, Counsel, and Strength, can do much toward the Encouragement and Assistance of each other : The Elder, and more knowing, may



instruct the Ignorant ; and all may strengthen each other's Hands in the Things of God and Godliness. They may defend each other against Injuries, Reproaches, and the Shame of Singularity, and join in all proper Practices to keep a Sense of divine Things lively and warm at their own Hearts, and to excite others to the same Practices of Piety and Goodness. Thus *social Religion* appears with Evidence to be the Duty of Mankind.

II. There are but two Ways whereby God teaches us Religion ; *i. e.* by the *Light of Nature*, which he has planted in Men, and by the *Light of Revelation*, which, in various Ways, and in different Ages of the World, he has communicated to Men. And accordingly, Religion is distinguished into *natural* and *revealed*. By each of these Methods of teaching, Men may be instructed in *social* as well as *personal* Godliness, and learn to perform the several Parts and Duties of it, according to their different Extent of Instruction.

As revealed Religion in general acknowledges natural Religion for its Foundation, so all the Parts of *social*, as well as *personal* Religion, whether *Doctrine* or *Duty*, *Worship* or *Order*, so far as they are revealed and prescribed in the Word of God, are still founded on Principles of natural Light and Reason. Whatsoever therefore Revelation has added,  
is

is but some positive or supernatural Structure upon that Foundation, without the Opposition or Contrariety to any Parts thereof; for it is God himself that teaches us by the Light of Nature and Reason; and we can never suppose that, by Revelation, he will give us Instructions which are contrary to the very Principles of Reason, and to those fundamental Lessons of Religion which he has written in our Natures.

Human Reason is the first Ground and Spring of all human Religion. Man is obliged to Religion because he is a reasonable Creature. Reason directs and obliges us not only to search out and practise the Will of God, as far as natural Conscience will lead us, but also to examine, receive, and obey, all the Revelations which come from God, where we are placed within the Reach of their proper Evidences. Wherein soever Revelation gives us plain and certain Rules for our Conduct, Reason itself obliges us to submit and follow them. Where the Rules of Duty are more obscure, we are to use our Reason to find them out, as far as we can, by comparing one Part of Revelation with another, and making just and reasonable Inferences from the various Circumstances and Connections of Things. In those Parts or Circumstances of Religion where Revelation is silent, there we are called to betake ourselves to Reason again, as our best Guide

and Conductor. And let it be observed, that there are many Instances also, wherein we are instructed to pay the same Honours to God, and fulfil the same Duties to Men, in the Practice of publick as well as private Religion, both by the Light of Reason and the Light of Revelation: For God, who knows the Weakness of our intellectual Powers, has been graciously pleased to give us a shorter, plainer, and easier Discovery of many rational and moral Truths and Duties by Revelation, which would have been very tedious and tiresome, as well as much more difficult, for the Bulk of Mankind, to have ever found out and ascertained by their own Reasonings.

III. When we have received upon just Evidence the New Testament, as a Revelation sent us from Heaven, then our own Reason and Conscience oblige us to search in these Writings, what new Doctrines God has there proposed to our Faith, and what new Duties to our Practice. And here, in our Search after the Things that relate to our *personal Religion*, we shall find several sublime and glorious Truths to be believed concerning the blessed Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and almost all the Oeconomy of our Salvation revealed to us, above and beyond what the Light of Reason ever discover, or so much as surmise,  
We



We shall here find also the Duties of Faith, in the Name, and Blood, and Righteousness, of the Son of God, for the Pardon of our Sins, and the Justification of our Persons ; Hope in his Resurrection ; Subjection to his Government ; offering up our Addresses of Prayer and Thanksgiving to God the Father, in his Name ; seeking the Influences of the Blessed Spirit, to sanctify our Souls ; waiting for the Return of *Christ* from Heaven, and for our own Resurrection to eternal Life. All these, I say, we shall find revealed and prescribed, over and above the Duties discovered by Reason. And besides these, we have the Institution of the two Sacraments, to be ever celebrated by *Christians*, as Memorials and Pledges of some of those Duties and Blessings.

And it is not at all to be wondered at, that the Gospel should require of us the additional Belief and Practice of such Doctrines and Duties in our *personal Religion*, as the Light of Nature knows nothing of ; because the very Design of the Gospel was to restore sinful Man to the Favour and Likeness of God, which the Light of Nature, or the Law of natural Religion, could not do : The Nations of the Earth, and the Men of the brightest Reason among them, in long Successions of Ages, had made sufficient Experiments of the *practical Insufficiency* of human Reason for that divine Purpose.

But when we come to enquire what Rules *Christ* has laid down for our Conduct in *social Religion*, distinct from these *evangelical* Doctrines and *personal* Duties, here we shall find far the greatest Number of the same Things which are prescribed to us by the holy Scripture, or at least represented as the Practices of the Apostles and primitive Christians, to be also prescribed by the Light of Nature ; we shall find them to be such Practices, or Rules of Conduct, as, upon the supposed Revelation of the *Christian* Doctrine and Sacraments, human Reason and Prudence would, for the most Part, lead us to perform.

And we may take Notice by the Way, that the chief Peculiarities of the Gospel in Faith and Practice, so far as relates to our *personal Religion*, are much more plainly and expressly dictated to us in Scripture, by Way of direct and explicit Revelation and Command ; whereas the Affairs that relate only to *social Religion*, (excepting the Sacraments,) are, for the most Part, hinted to us in a Way of Narrative, and are to be drawn out by Inferences ; wherein much more is left to the Exercises of our own reasoning Powers, than in the Matters of *personal* Faith and Practice.

IV. I would ask Leave to observe here, that it is a fashionable and modish Thing now-a-days, to represent the whole Religion


of *Christ*, whether *personal* or *social*, as little more than the mere Religion of Nature, revised and reformed from the Corruptions of the sinful and degenerate Nations, both *Jewish* and *Gentile* ; which Opinion I can never assent to, so far as it regards the peculiar evangelical and glorious Truths and Duties, which relate more immediately to our *personal Religion*, to our Salvation and eternal Life in the World to come : Yet, in Matters that relate to the Constitution and Government of *Christian Churches*, whose chief Design is to hold forth and maintain our *Religion publickly* and visibly in this World, I am not afraid to say, that there is a most happy Correspondency and Similarity between the Dictates of the Light of Nature, and the Prescriptions of the New Testament almost all the Way.

In this Affair Revelation does not add a great deal of new Duty beyond what Reason would teach us, as very proper to maintain natural Religion in the publick Profession of it. This will sufficiently appear in the following Particulars.



## S E C T. II.

### *Instances of the Agreement of Reason and Revelation in social Religion.*

I.  Herefoever *publick* and *social Religion* is to be maintained, the *Light of Reason* teaches us, that several Persons, who profess the same Religion, must sometimes meet together, to celebrate the Solemnities, Rites, and Ordinances thereof, and to worship God according to the Rules of it. When this Religion is professed by great Multitudes, or by whole Nations, it is not possible they should all be convened together in one Place, so as to join frequently in the same Acts of Worship, to offer their united Prayers or Praises to God, in a regular and rational Manner, and with Conveniency and Edification to such a vast Assembly. In such a Case therefore, it is necessary, that they should be separated into distinct Societies, for the same Purpose.

And does not the *New Testament* sufficiently indicate these Things to us, as relating



to the *social Religion* of Christians? Do we not find them frequently met together in the History of the *Acts of the Apostles*; that *with one Mind and one Mouth they may glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*; as in Rom. xv. 6. Are not such Assemblies continually mentioned and encouraged in the Epistles? And are not *Christians* exhorted to maintain this Custom, and *not to forsake the assembling of themselves together*? Heb. x. 25. Do we not find the Christian Converts of the same Country divided into particular Congregations, which are called *Churches*, who meet together for this Purpose? The *Church at Corinth*? the *Church at Philippi*; the *Churches of Galatia*: 1 Cor. xvi. 1. *The seven Churches of Asia*: Rev. i. 11. *All the Churches of the Saints*. 1 Cor. xiv. 33.

II. The *Light of Nature and Reason* teaches, that where Persons join together for any religious Service, they must be agreed in the main and most important Points that relate to it. *How can two walk together except they be agreed*? Amos iii. 3. For otherwise perpetual Jarring and Confusion of Opinions and Practices would arise in the very Worship itself, which would destroy all the Delight, the Harmony, and Decency of it. A Worshipper of the true God cannot join in natural Religion with a Worshipper of Idols.

And

And yet, it is not every little Difference in Sentiment and Opinion about the true God, or his Worship, that is sufficient to exclude Persons from the same religious Society, where their Agreement is so great, as that the chief Ends of publick Worship may be happily maintained. Therefore *Abraham* and *Melchizedec* might join in the same Worship of the one true God, though *Abraham* was taken into a peculiar Covenant with special Promises, and *Melchizedec* practised Religion upon the antient Principle and Dispensation of his Father *Noah*. *Gen.* xiv. 18, 19, 20, 22. So *Abraham* worshipped God with *Abimelech*, the King of the *Philistines*, upon the same general Principle, and they made a Covenant, and sware together by the true God. *Gen.* xxi. 22,---31.

And does not the *New Testament* teach us the same Practice, (*viz.*) that where Persons would be united in Christian Worship and religious Society, they must agree in their Religion so far at least, as to make a credible Profession of their being the sincere Disciples of *Christ*, and must make known their Agreement in all the necessary Principles of Christianity\*. They must profess

\* Here it is not proper to divert so far from my Subject, as to enter into a Debate, how many of the Christian Doctrines are of absolute Necessity to make a *Disciple of Christ*, or a *true Christian*: This is an endless Controversy, according to the different Opinions of Men.

not only the one true God, but Faith in *Jesus Christ*, the Lord, in his most important Characters and Offices, together with such Repentance of Sin, and such a visible Practice of Holiness, as may give Reason to hope their Profession is sincere. In the primitive Times they *confessed their Faith*, and then *they shewed their Works*, Acts xix. 18. and thereby proved their Profession to be sincere, and their Faith to be a true or *living Faith*. James ii. 17, 18. It was commanded that the *Jews should bring forth Fruits meet for Repentance*, in Order to be admitted to *John's Baptism*. Matt. iii. 8. And surely then it must be required to the Baptism of Christianity, or a Union with the Disciples of *Christ* \*. They are generally described to be such as *worship God, through Jesus Christ* our Lord, and profess that *Faith which worketh by Love*; which is the Substance of Christianity in a very few Words.

And though there are, and will be, some lesser Differences in Sentiment among *Christians* in all Ages, and though they are as great as were between the *Jewish* and the *Gentile* Converts in primitive Times; yet the New Testament teaches, that they may all unite in the same

\* Let it be observed, that in this, and other Parts of my Discourse, I speak only of *adult Persons*, who are capable of professing their Faith; being not willing to embarrass this Discourse with the Controversy relating to *Infants*, their *Discipleship*, or their *Baptism*.

Christian Society, and *receive one another in the Lord*; i. e. to all the Privileges of Fellow-Christians, and the Fellowship of Gospel-Ordinances, *even upon as large a Foot as Christ has received them*. Rom. xvi. 2. and xv. 7. Whether they are *strong or weak in the Faith*, they are to be thus received, without entangling their Minds *with more doubtful and disputable Things*; Rom. xiv. 1. that is, whether they eat Herbs or Flesh, or believe *some Days were holy, or every Day alike*. Ver. 3, 4, 5.

III. Again, *The Light of Reason* teacheth, that there must be a mutual Consent, Compact, or Agreement, amongst such Persons as profess the same Religion, to walk according to the Directions and Dictates of it, and to assist and encourage, to join and support one another, in the Profession and Practice of it, as well as to meet and worship together at *certain Seasons*, and a *certain Place*. This Engagement for *mutual Assistance* is very necessary, for the Support of any Religion in the World; and without such an Agreement *as to Time and Place*, a Company of Men cannot meet for any Purpose whatsoever, either in Things civil or religious \*.

If

\* Where the Magistrate takes upon him, (whether with or without Order from Heaven) to appoint all the Forms, Times, and Places of Worship, and the People willingly consent to it, and obey the Magistrate herein,  
this



If there be any precise Time, and any particular Place, appointed for this Purpose by divine Revelation, Reason immediately determines that we must meet at that Time and that Place: But where there is not any such divine Direction, there the Place and Time must be concerted and agreed by those who are united in such a Society; nor has any one Person Power to impose his Will or Humour upon the rest. The Acts of Religion must be all free and voluntary.

Now what faith the *New Testament* in this Case? The Union, or mutual Agreement among particular Christians for this Purpose, which is the Bond of their Society, is expressed by *St. Paul*, or, at least, it is included in that Phrase *of receiving one another, as Christ has received us*; Rom. xv. 7. *that with one Mouth we may glorify God.* It is a mutual receiving one another *in the Lord*. Rom. xvi. 2. The Word is used to the same Purpose, *Rom. xiv. 1.* and in other Scriptures. If this *Agreement* be not expressed so plainly in Scripture as some Persons might expect, it is because the very Nature of Things, and the Reason of Man, makes this mutual Consent and Agreement so necessary to keep up any publick Religion, that it was not needful for the

this is an implicate Agreement among themselves, and attains the same End, in some Measure, though it may happen to infringe Christian Liberty.

Scriptures

Scriptures to be more exprefs or particular in the Appointment of it.

As for *the Place of Worship*, there is none made sacred, or divinely appointed, under the New Testament. John iv. 21, &c. *Neither in this Mountain, Gerizim, nor at Jerusalem, shall they worship the Father; but the Hour cometh, and now is at Hand, when, without Regard to any particular Place, they shall be accounted true Worshippers, who worship God in Spirit and in Truth.* And therefore, some convenient Place must be agreed upon by the Society, since the New Testament determines none.

As to *the Time*, it is confessed that we *Christians* have not so exprefs and particular Prescriptions of the Seasons of Worship as the *Jews* enjoyed, neither as to their weekly Sabbath, or any other of their Festivals; but there is sufficient Evidence from sacred History, that the first Day of the Week was the usual Season of publick *Christian* Worship in the Apostles Times, and in the following Ages; and the Day was known among *Christians* by the honourable Title of *the Lord's Day*, so far, that the Observation of it was the Characteristick, or distinguishing Mark of a *Christian*. Now since it was so early and so universally practised by the Professors of Christianity, we have just Reason to think it was appointed by the inspired Apostles, that *Christians* should come together

to worship God on that Day, and give Honour to their Risen Saviour. *Acts* ii. 1, ---4. 41. xx. 7. *1 Cor.* xvi. 1, 2. *Rev.* i. 10. And that they should agree to come to worship at the same Time, and the same Place, is evident from *1 Cor.* xi. 20, 33. and xiv. 23. *The whole Church were to be gathered together at one Place, otherwise they were to tarry for one another till the chief Part of them were come.*

IV. Since Mankind is mortal, and every human Assembly will die away by Degrees, unless it be supplied with new Members, *common Reason* directs every religious Society to receive in new Members, upon their Appearance to be properly qualified, according to the Rules of that Religion, and the Judgment of that Society; that there may be a Continuance of this Religion in the World.

And in the same Manner the *Light of Nature*, or *Reason*, and *common Prudence*, teach us also, that if the Persons who have thus professed any particular Religion, do either renounce it in Principle or Profession, or maintain, in a publick and notorious Manner, such a Set of Notions, or such a Course of Conversation, or of Worship, as is inconsistent with it, this religious Society will think it proper to cast such Persons out of their Fellowship, that they may not infect the rest, nor dishonour their Religion: For what

Fellowship has Light with Darkneſs, a Man of Vice with the Sons of Virtue, a *Turk* with a *Jew*, or a *Pagan* with a *Chriſtian* ?

And does not the New Teſtament repreſent to us the *Chriſtian Churches* receiving new Members on their Profeſſion of Chriſtianity ? *Acts* ii. 41, 47. *They who gladly received the Word were baptized; and the ſame Day there were added to them about three Thouſand Souls: And the Lord added to the Church daily ſuch as ſhould be ſaved.* And does not the Apoſtle teach the Churches to take Care that they be kept pure, and free from Scandal, by ſeparating themſelves from evil Members, and by caſting out thoſe that depart from the Truth, or are guilty of groſs Immoralities ? *2 Theſſ.* iii. 6. *Withdraw yourſelves from every Brother that walketh diſorderly.* *1 Cor.* v. 5, 11, 13. *When ye are gathered together, deliver ſuch a one to Satan\*.* *Purge out the old Leaven, that ye may be a new Lump: i. e. Put away from among yourſelves that wicked Perſon. If a Man that is called a Brother be a Fornicator, or an Idolater, or a Railer, or a Drunkard, or an Extortioner, keep no Company with ſuch a*

\* Whether the delivering an Offender to Satan, in the primitive Times, did include in it the Inſiction of any ſore bodily Diſeaſe, though it be probable, yet it is not certain, nor univerſally agreed; but I think it is agreed pretty univerſally, that ſuch a one was caſt out of the Church, and delivered back again into the World, which is the Kingdom of Satan; who is called in Scripture the Prince and the God of this World. *John* i. 4. *2 Cor.* iv. 4.

one;



*one ; no, not to eat. And those who deny the Resurrection, and overthrow the Faith of some, are delivered to Satan, and cast out of the Church into the World, which is his Kingdom, that they may learn not to blaspheme.*

1 Tim. i. 19, 20. and 2 Epist. ii. 17, 18.

*Reason and Christianity* also join to inform us, that, upon the credible Evidence of a sincere Repentance, and a Change of Heart and Life, such Offender should be forgiven, and received into the religious Society again : So the offending *Corinthian* was forgiven, and received and restored again to the Love and Communion of the *Christian Church* there. See 2 Cor. ii. 7, 8, 9.

V. It is evident to *common Reason*, when such a voluntary religious Society is instituted, the Right of receiving or casting out Members, or restoring them upon Repentance, lies *originally* in the Society itself, because the Society itself is formed, and subsists, by the mutual Compact of its own Members ; and whatsoever Qualifications are required of Persons, in order to become Members of this Body, it is the Society itself that has an *original* Right to judge whether the Persons have these Qualifications or no. It was upon the mutual Acknowledgement of such Qualifications, expressed or implied, that this Society was first founded ; and as a voluntary Society, it must be maintained on



the same Foot, otherwise new Members will be likely to be admitted, and imposed upon them, to the great Dislike and Injury of the Society.

Indeed they may depute several particular Persons of their Number, whom they suppose better skilled therein, as Elder and Wiser, to act for the whole Society, and particularly to examine into the Qualifications of Persons, and the Merits of the Cause, when Members are to be received, or to be cast out; but they should never renounce their own original Right. They may also appoint any particular Person to go before the rest in this Matter, to give them his Advice herein, to acquaint them what Persons are fit to be received, and to pronounce the Sentence of receiving them into the Society, or excluding them from it, according to the Evidence of their Qualifications: And this, I presume, will be usually allowed to be the Office of the fixed Pastor, or President of the Assembly, where there is such a President.

And does not the *New Testament* generally give Directions agreeable to this Dictate of the *Light of Nature*? Does not St. Paul direct to the *Churches* themselves his apostolic Advices about receiving, casting out, or restoring Members? See his Advice to the Church at *Rome*, Rom. i. 7. and xiv. 1. *Ye, Saints at Rome, receive him that is weak in Faith.* Rom. xv. 7. *Receive ye one another.* Rom.

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Rom. xvi. 2. *Receive ye Phebe in the Lord, as becometh Saints* \*. See his Advice to the Corinthians, 1 Cor. v. 4. *In the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, deliver such a wicked Man to Satan.* Ver. 13. *Put away from among yourselves that wicked Person.* And in 2 Cor. ii. 6. this is called a *Punishment inflicted by many*. And Ver. 7, 8, 10. the Church was taught and required to *forgive him* upon his evident Repentance, to *confirm their Love towards him*, and to restore him to the Fellowship of the Church.

It is granted indeed, when proper Officers are chosen and fixed among them, it is by their Ministrations, by their Advice and Direction, Christian Churches should usually exercise this Discipline; and so the Orders of *Christ* are directed to the *Angels* of the Churches. Rev. ii. and iii. But the whole Work of Reformation and Discipline there required, is such as eminently concerns the Churches or People themselves, and not the Pastor only.

It is also granted, that many Times Churches do commit the whole Care of this Matter into the Hand of their Ministers, as being

\* It is granted this Text refers to *Phebe*, as a Traveller at *Rome*, and desiring to hold *occasional Communion* with the Christian Church there; but the Reason of Things is the same, or stronger, with Regard to receiving Persons into a *fixed and constant Communion* with any Church: There must be still a mutual Agreement.

usually fittest to judge of the Profession made; but it ought never to be so entirely given into their Hands, as to renounce the People's Right of judging in these Affairs. *Diotrephes, who loved to have the Pre-eminence among them, assumed to himself the Right of receiving and casting out Members from the Church*; but he was severely re-proved for his Pride and Usurpation, when he *forbid* his Fellow-Christians *to receive Brethren* who were worthy. 3 John 9, 10. Ministers may happen to prove so injudicious, or so negligent of Enquiry into the Profession and Qualifications of Persons to be admitted, so subject to Prejudices, or so engaged in a Party-Quarrel, as to fill the Church with such Members as may be very contrary to the Sentiments of the Majority of the Church; and if the People renounce their own Right in this Affair, they may thank themselves for such unhappy Consequences.

I would add also, that if People entirely give up the Right of Admission and Exclusion to the Minister alone, they can never cast the Minister himself out, if he be never so impious or immoral.

Having found the *Constitution of a Christian Church* to be so conformable to the Dictates of *right Reason*, let us consider what are the *Acts of Worship* which are to be paid to God in publick, and in what Manner must they be performed; and we shall find the

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*Light of Reason* and the *New Testament* happily agreeing here also.

VI. The several Acts of Worship which the *Light of Nature* directs us to pay to the great God, are such as these : To adore him with all Humility, on the Account of his glorious Perfections, and his wonderful Works of Power and Wisdom ; to join together in Prayer to God for such Blessings as we stand in Need of ; to confess our Sins, and ask the Forgiveness of them ; to acknowledge his Mercies, and give Thanks to his Goodness ; and to sing with the Voice to his Honour and Praise. The *Light of Nature* directs us also to seek continually a further Acquaintance with the Nature and Will of that God whom we worship, in order to practise our Duty the better, and please our Creator ; and to provide some Way for the further Instruction of those who are ignorant of that Religion, and come into their Assemblies to be instructed ; and for the Exhortation of the People to fulfil their Duty to God and their Neighbours. And if there are any special Rites or Ceremonies, such as belong to social Worship, the *Light of Nature* tells us, that here they ought to be performed.

And does not the *New Testament* set all these Matters before us so plainly and frequently, with Regard to Christianity, that I



need not stand to cite Chapter and Verse, where these Things are practised by the Apostles, and the primitive Christians, in their Assemblies? Here Adorations, Prayers, and Thanksgivings, are offered up to God, but in the Name of *Jesus*, as their only Mediator: Here their Addresses are made to God with one Mind, and with one Mouth, to the Glory of God, who is the God and Father of our Lord *Jesus Christ*: Here Psalms, and Hymns, and spiritual Songs, are sung to the Honour of the Creator and Redeemer: Here the Word of God is preached for the Instruction of the Ignorant or Unbelievers, who come into the *Christian* Assemblies, that Sinners or Infidels may be converted, and Christians edified, and exhorted to persist in the Faith, and improve in Holiness. 1 *Cor.* xiv. 23. Here the great Ordinance of Christian Communion, the *Lord's Supper*, is celebrated, by distributing and receiving Bread and Wine, and eating and drinking in Remembrance of their common Saviour, and his Death. 1 *Cor.* xi. 20, &c. As for the other Ordinance, *viz. Baptism*, it being not so properly an Act of publick or social Religion, I do not find it is any where required to be done in publick; and though it might be rendered more extensively useful by that Means for some Purposes, yet it may be performed in private Houses, or in retired Places, as it sometimes was in the primitive Age.



VII. Since there ought to be such publick Ministrations performed as I have described, our own *Reason and Observation of Mankind* sufficiently informs us, that all Persons are not capable of leading these publick religious Services ; *viz.* they are not all fit to speak usefully in the Name of Men to God, in Prayer or Praise, or to teach the Things of God to others, in a profitable and becoming Manner, nor with Decency and Exactness to celebrate all the Rites and Ceremonies of any Religion. *Reason* itself therefore directs us that there should be one or more Persons chosen in every religious Assembly, who should be wise and prudent, grave, sober, and faithful, and better skilled in the Things of Religion than others ; and who should be capable in a more clear and happy Manner to express them, that he, or they, may go before the Congregation, and lead them in their several Acts of Worship ; that they may give Instruction to the rest, and with their Lips offer up their common Addresses to God, and celebrate the sacred Rites of their Religion.

For this Purpose *Reason* teaches us, that if a Person so qualified be not found in any particular religious Society, they ought to seek one elsewhere. And Persons who have superior Skill in this Religion, should train up others, from Time to Time, in the Articles of their Religion, that they may be able  
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to instruct the People, and become more capable of this publick Service.

If it be enquired, What the *Light of Reason* directs about the *Investiture* of such a Person in this Office? I know of nothing more, but that the People should make all due Enquiry concerning his *Qualifications*; that they should ask the Opinion or Advice of other Teachers, who are better skilled in this Religion than themselves, where it can be conveniently obtained; and when they themselves also have had sufficient Experience of his Abilities, and Knowledge of his Virtues, they should agree to chuse him into this Office; and that he himself solemnly should accept of it, and devote, or give up, himself to it; and that he should be with great Solemnity recommended, by publick Prayers, to the Blessing of God, in the Discharge of it. This is all the Investiture that Reason seems to require \*. And this Man, thus set apart to the sacred Work, should

\* According to the Light of Nature and Reason, no Man should be made a Teacher, or President, or Leader in any voluntary religious Society, but by the Consent and Agreement of that Society, to put themselves under his Instructions and Care. No Civil Powers have Authority, by the Law of Nature, in these Matters of Religion and Conscience; nor can any Man be made an Officer in any Society, without his own free Consent: And as all religious Affairs regard either the Honour of God or converse with him, so an Address to God for a Blessing, is a natural and reasonable Solemnity, that should attend the Entrance into a religious Office.

continually endeavour to improve his Qualifications, and render his religious Services more and more useful to the People, and take due Care, as a faithful *Overseer*, that the People maintain the Practice of the Religion they profess.

*Reason* itself also teaches us, that if there be any Persons in the Assembly who give sufficient Evidence of their being inspired, or taught of God, and of having any divine Commission to instruct the People; these Persons ought eminently to be received as Teachers, and employed in such religious Service.

Let us see now what the *New Testament*, or the Rule of *Christianity*, directs in this Point.

This is sufficiently evident, that Scripture has appointed such a Set of Men, or such Officers in the Christian Church, as may lead divine Worship in their Assemblies, and may celebrate the Institutions of the Gospel among them. We find their Names and Titles frequently mentioned as Pastors, Teachers, Elders, Bishops, Shepherds, &c. We find the Duties of their Station often spoken of, the Characters and Qualification of the Persons described, their Support provided for, and the People's Duty to them enjoined. And since the Church is to continue to the End of the World, or till *Christ* comes again from Heaven, it is plain  
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there must be always such Persons to minister in holy Things in every Age.

In the very primitive Times there was a great Variety of Talents and Capacities, for the Ministrations of Christian Worship, conferred by Inspiration upon those who embraced the Religion of *Christ*: These were taught of God in a more immediate Manner \*: And where these extraordinary Gifts were numerous, either they needed no other Preachers, Teachers, or Ministers, (always supposing some wise Person amongst them to be a *πρῶτος*, a *President*, or *Chairman*, who, by natural Rules of Prudence and Order, should keep their various Performances within the Limits of Decency and Edification;) or, at least, they were not yet furnished with particular Officers, being then but in an imperfect State as to regular Order. Such was the *Corinthian* Church: And where any Apostle or Evangelist was present, he is reasonably supposed to *preside*; or, in his Absence, he sometimes gives Direction for their Conduct, *as though he were present*. 1 Cor. v. 3, 4.

But in other Churches, where these Gifts were but few, the chief Possessors of them, and espe-

\* These Gifts were so much distributed in that Day among the Christians at *Jerusalem*, that even the *Deacons*, who were appointed to take Care of the Poor, had such extraordinary Gifts, and exercised them now and then in teaching the People as Evangelists. See *Acts* vi. 2, 3.



cially the early and more experienced Converts, were chosen out to be Elders, or Guides, and Leaders of their Worship, Pastors, or Teachers, according to their peculiar Talents of Exhortation, or of Instruction: And they were sometimes called *Overseers*, that is, *Bishops*, having an Oversight of the People, and their Behaviour; being reasonably supposed to know more of the Will of *Christ* than the common People, and to be more solicitous for the Honour of Christianity, and for its Preservation.

It is probable that sometimes these Elders, or Overseers, (which Words are used promiscuously in several Places of the New Testament \*) might be pointed out by the Direction of a Spirit of Prophecy, or by the Gift of Discernment of Spirits, by the Apostles, or other inspired Men, in that Day, as *Timothy* was pointed out by *Prophecy*, to be an

\* It may not be improper in this Place to point out the chief Scriptures where these Characters are used promiscuously, and seem to denote one and the same Office. Acts xx. 17. *From Miletus Paul sent to Ephesus, and called the Elders of the Church.* But in Ver. 28. *St. Paul* calls these very Persons *Overseers*, ἐπισκόπους, *Bishops*. Tit. i. 5. *Ordain Elders in every City.* Ver. 6. *If any be blameless, &c. For, in Ver. 7. a Bishop must be blameless.* 2 Pet. v. 1, 2. *The Elders which are among you, I exhort, who am also an Elder; feed the Flock of God, taking the Oversight thereof, the Bishoprick thereof,* ἐπισκοπήσεις. But our *English* Translators have generally taken Care to keep the Word *Bishop* for the most Part out of Sight, where it is applied to Presbyters, or Elders, in the *Greek*.



Evangelist. 1 *Tim.* i. 18. and iv. 14. And in this Sense the Apostles and Evangelists, *Paul* and *Barnabas*, *Timothy* and *Titus* might perhaps, by the Direction of the Holy Spirit, nominate the Persons fit to be *ordained Elders in the Churches*, and, upon the Consent of the Churches, might *ordain or appoint them* for that Purpose. *Acts* xiv. 23. 1 *Tim.* v. 22. *Tit.* i. 5. And perhaps this is the Reason why it is said of the Elders of *Ephesus*, that *the Holy Ghost had made them Overseers*. *Acts* xx. 17, 28. But it is hardly to be supposed that any Persons were made Rulers, Teachers, or Overseers of any Church of serious Christians, without the Consent of the Society, who were to be taught and governed by them in Matters relating to their eternal Interests.

Even when an Apostle was to be chosen in the Room of *Judas*, the Hundred and Twenty Disciples, of whom Eleven were Apostles, joined in the Choice of Two Persons, out of which the Lot determined One to be an Apostle. *Acts* i. 15, 23. Deacons, who manage the secular Affairs of the Church, were chosen by the People. *Acts* vi. 3. And still more reasonable it is, that Elders, or Bishops, who have the Care of their Souls, should be chosen by them who want and desire their Instructions in such important Concerns.

In following Ages, when these extraordinary Gifts ceased in the Churches, it is more evident

evident from the Histories of those Times, that their Overseers, or Bishops, were chosen by the People. And the Characters of them are given us at large, and very particularly, in two Places of Scripture. 1 *Tim.* iii. 1, &c. and *Tit.* i. 5, 6. And certainly this is left upon Record, that we might be directed in such a Choice to the End of the World, as well as to give Directions to *Timothy* and *Titus* in the Performance of their extraordinary Office at that Time.

As for the *Investiture* of Men with this Office, the New Testament gives us some Notices that they were set apart by *solemn Prayer and Fasting*, and generally with *laying on of the Hands of Persons* who were inspired, or possessed of some superior Character. Whether this Rite were designed to communicate any new Gifts, or to pronounce an inspired and effectual Blessing on their Ministrations; or whether it was only retained in the Christian Church as it had been an antient Rite, used almost from the earliest Ages of Mankind, on several Occasions, particularly in the solemn Benediction of a Person, or in the Prayer for a Blessing on him, or Appointment of him to any special Service, I am not able to determine \*. This is certain,

\* *Timothy*, a young Evangelist, had the Hands of the Elders, *i. e.* the *Presbytery*, laid upon him. 1 *Tim.* iv. 14. And perhaps, at the same Time, he was blessed by  
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certain, that the Rite of Imposition of Hands has something natural in it, when we pray for a Blessing to descend on any particular Person, and more especially at his Entrance into an Office ; as it were to point him out in a visible Manner to God and the World. Good old *Jacob* laid his Hands on *Ephraim* and *Manasseh*, when he blessed them. *Gen.* xlviii. And in *Deut.* xxxiv. *Moses* laid his Hands on *Joshua*, as his Successor. The Children of *Israel* also laid their Hands on the *Levites*, at their Dedication to the Service of the Tabernacle. *Numb.* viii. But as there are different Opinions on this Subject, I dismiss it, without any further Determination than this, that it seems to be a Sort of natural Ceremony, an innocent and antient Rite at such Seasons ; though I do not see sufficient Proof of the certain Necessity of it. Even as *lifting up the Hands to Heaven*, in Prayer for a Blessing on one's self, is a Sort of natural Rite, or Gesture, used by *Jews*

the Hands of *St. Paul* with extraordinary Gifts. *2 Tim.* i: 16. And he himself, an Evangelist, was ordered to *lay Hands suddenly on no Man.* *1 Tim.* v. 22. It is a Question indeed whether *Timothy*, or the Presbytery, could confer any extraordinary Gifts or Blessings ; it is more probable, for many Reasons, that this belonged only to the Apostles ; and then this their Imposition of Hands could not be designed for the conferring of extraordinary Gifts ; but still it might be used to pronounce a prophetic Blessing on the Preacher, which no uninspired Person could do ; or finally, it might be the ordinary Form of Benediction, or of Institution to an Office.

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and *Heathens*, and yet not necessary to be used in every solitary or personal Prayer. The *laying on the Hands on another Person*, when we are praying for a Blessing on him, seems to be of the same Kind, (*viz.*) a Sort of natural Rite or Gesture, much used in the Old Testament and the New ; and tho' it is not plainly made necessary on every such Occasion, yet it must be still acknowledged it was often, if not always, used in the primitive and inspired Times, when either Gifts or Offices were conferred by some particular Persons upon others.

And it certainly adds a Sort of Solemnity to the Work ; and it has so much of Countenance from Scripture, that I think it cannot be called a mere human and arbitrary Invention of Men.

This is certain, that such Persons were to be trained up in a Succession for this Service in the Christian Churches. *Timothy* was required to commit to faithful Men the Things that he had heard and learnt of St. Paul, that they might be able to teach others also. 2 Tim. ii. 2. And these Persons were to give up themselves continually to the Word and Prayer, as the Apostles did, *Acts* vi. 4. and to excite and stir up their Talents for Instruction and Edification, to give Attendance to Reading, to Exhortation, and Doctrine ; to meditate upon these Things, and give themselves wholly to them, that their profiting might appear to all.



For if this be required of so extraordinary a Person as *Timothy*, 1 Tim. iv. 3. much more reasonably is it required of those who have no extraordinary Gifts.

I might further add, that these Teachers and Ministers of the Gospel are required in the New Testament to be faithful, diligent, and zealous in the Work of *Christ*, *willingly taking the Care, or Oversight*, of the religious Concerns of the People, in *instructing and overseeing the Flock*, and *watching over them* for their spiritual Good, as well as going before them in all Acts of Holiness, and being *Examples* to all other Christians *in Word, in Conversation, in Faith, in Charity, and in Purity from all Sin.* Ver. 12.





### S E C T. III.

*A brief Enquiry how far the Modes of the Mission, or Ordination, of primitive Ministers, are our Rule now.*



P O N this short Survey of Things, under this Head, give me Leave first to make one *Observation*, and then consider the *Enquiry* proposed.

The *Observation* is this : Various were the Affairs and Regulations of the primitive Churches, relating to their several *Officers*, whether Apostles, Evangelists, Bishops, Pastors, Teachers, Prophets, Elders, &c. and in the *Nomination of those Officers*, whether by *Jesus Christ* himself, by Prayer and Lot, by Inspiration of the Spirit, by Prophecy, by Gifts of discerning Spirits, or by the Choice of the People, &c. And in their *Ordination*, or *Mission*, by Fasting, and by Imposition of Hands, as well as Prayer : And whether this were performed by the Apostles, Prophets, Presbyters, or Elders, or Evan-

gelists, &c. Now all these Things at that Time were so very much directed, governed, influenced, determined, and transacted by *extraordinary Gifts*, and the inspired Persons who possessed them, that I cannot find, in the New Testament, any one Instance of the Choice and Mission, Appointment or Investiture, of any ordinary Officer in the Church, by any other Officer, or Officers, who were not of the extraordinary Kind ; and therefore these Things cannot, in every Point, be Rules or Patterns for all following Times.

If any one here *object*, that if we suppose the *Formation, Ordination, and Mission of Ministers*, to be so described in the *Acts of the Apostles*, as not to give following Ages an exact Rule or Pattern for their ordinary Practice ; why may we not also suppose some of the *Doctrines and Duties of personal Christianity* described in the Gospel, to belong only to extraordinary Times ?

The Answer is easy ; (*viz.*) That Mankind are to be saved through all Ages of Christianity in the same Way, by the same Gospel, the same Doctrines and Duties. But the Preachers of this Gospel may not be furnished nor ordained the same Way, when extraordinary Commissions, extraordinary Gifts, and Powers, are ceased : For it is apparent, that these extraordinary Preachers and Governors of the Church mingled the Ex-  
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ercise of their extraordinary Powers with some of their ordinary Ministrations.

Hence it comes to pass, that it is so difficult a Question, and so exceeding hard to affirm with Exactness and Certainty, *how many of these Officers, and of these solemn Rites and Actions*, were designed by *Christ* to be continued in the following ordinary Occasions of the Churches, when extraordinary Gifts should cease; and *how many of these Forms* are to be practised in all succeeding Ages. Most of the learned and inquisitive Men who have written since, have greatly differed in their Opinions of this Matter, and left many Things therein *difficult*, or *dubious*, after all their laborious Comments.

Let us enquire then what there is of all these Things, that is certain and necessary in our Age, and is not subject to this Occasion of doubting which I have mentioned.

(1.) This seems *certain* by the *Light of Nature and Reason*, that *Christian Assemblies*, as well as any others, in ordinary as well as extraordinary Times, should have a *Teacher*, to instruct the Ignorant in Knowledge, and make known to the Church the Mind and Will of God in his Word: They should have an *Exhorter*, to stir up the People to the Practice of their Duty; a *Man of Prayer*, to address God in their publick Devotions; an *Overseer*, or *Bishop*, to take Charge of the Flock, to inspect the Manners of the People,

and watch for the Good of their Souls; a *President*, to be Chairman in their Assemblies, to keep up Order there; and a grave and skilful Person, fit to administer the Rites and Seals of the Christian Religion. Now all these Characters, Capacities, and Talents, are often contained in one single Person, who may be sufficient for a small Church; or, perhaps, in two or three Persons, for the Supply of larger Churches.

(2.) I think we may take it also for a Certainty, that where God doth not interpose to point out the *Teachers*, or *Overseers*, in any Christian Church, by Inspiration, there is no Person or Persons, either in the Church or the State, who have any rightful Power, derived either from Reason or Scripture, to impose a *Teacher*, or *Overseer*, on any Assembly of *Christians* whatsoever, without their own Consent; for it is they themselves must give an Account for their own Souls to God; and therefore, they must have a Right to chuse who shall teach and lead them in Matters of Religion. Conscience is too sacred a Thing to be imposed upon by fallible Men, and the Soul is too valuable to have its Concerns intrusted with any Persons, without our own Agreement.

And though the Choice or Consent of the Churches may not be so particularly mentioned in Scripture, when Elders or Bishops were ordained among them, by Persons who  
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were inspired, yet Reason itself supposes it ; and their extraordinary Gifts from the Holy Spirit, proved and required the Duty of Submission and Consent in the People, even if they had not a Hand in the first chusing of them. The great God could do them no Wrong by appointing Elders, or Bishops, for them, in an immediate Way, or by Inspiration.

But when extraordinary Gifts ceased, we find many Testimonies in the early Writers, to the Consent of the People in the Choice of their Church-Officers. The Scripture itself makes it evident, that *Deacons* were chosen by the People in primitive Times. Acts vi. 3. *Brethren, look ye out from among you seven Men, &c.* And these were to be intrusted only with the Money, or temporal Things of the Church. And Nature, and universal Custom, teach us, that *Physicians* and *Lawyers*, who are intrusted with the Care of the Bodies and Estates of Men, are not imposed on us by others, but are chosen by the Persons who intrust them. If I would learn Philosophy, or any Science, Art, or Trade, I have a natural Right to chuse who shall instruct me in it. Even Children are allowed to chuse their own *Guardians* ; and Boys, who are Apprentices, to chuse their own *Masters*. And doth not Reason loudly proclaim this Truth, that the *Guides of our Souls* in Religion ought to be chosen



by ourselves when we are at the Age of Man, as being a Matter of dearer and more divine Importance than any other; and an Affair in whose Success none can be so much concerned as ourselves; for it is of ourselves that God will expect a final Account. Let us take Heed then to our own Conduct in this Matter, and remember, that the New Testament has never appointed any uninspired Men to chuse Pastors or Teachers for a whole Assembly of People, and impose them upon the Assembly, or upon any particular Members thereof, against their Will.

(3.) It is *certain* also, that due Care ought to be taken that the Persons be fitly qualified, who are chosen into this Office or Ministry: And though private Christians have a Right to chuse their Ministers, and may best judge of the general Suitableness of their Talents to their own Edification, yet they are seldom so fit Judges of the learned Qualifications of Ministers, as those who have been some Years Ministers, Pastors, or Teachers themselves, whether of the same or of neighbouring Churches; and therefore, Reason tells us, it is generally most proper that some of these more knowing and experienced Men should be consulted in this Matter; and, after due Examination and Knowledge of the Person, their Approbation be obtained to encourage the Choice of the People, where it can be conveniently  
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had: And therefore, in Scripture, (as I shall shew immediately,) we never find any Ordinations by the People alone, without superior Helps; nor should it ever be done, where such Helps can be obtained.

(4.) May I not add, It is *certain* also, that there ought to be some sacred Solemnity attending the Investiture or Ordination of every such Officer? This has always been done in all Nations, both in civil and sacred Affairs. This ought to be done by a solemn and publick Dedication of himself to this Service, with the Prayers of the Church concurring to seek a divine Blessing on him therein. Reason itself dictates this as a most proper Practice. And it is as *certain*, that the Union and Assistance of a few other Ministers, both in Prayer and in Exhortation, make a Sort of beautiful Harmony, and add solemn Weight to this Transaction of dedicating a Person to God: They are generally better capable of offering up the Prayers of the Society to God on such an Occasion: They are best able to give a Word of Counsel or Advice to the new Minister and to the People; which is a Ceremony that should usually attend such an Investiture into this Office; for *every Thing is sanctified by the Word and Prayer*: And this will have a Tendency to maintain a happy Union and Correspondence between different Assemblies of the same Religion, whether the Ministers put their  
Hands

Hands on the Head of the new Minister or no.

(5.) This is also certain, that the Imposition of Hands, or any Ordination whatsoever, by Bishops or Presbyters, can never be absolutely necessary to make a new Presbyter or Bishop; for the Lord *Jesus Christ* would never leave the Subsistence or Propagation of his Churches, or the Vertue or Efficacy of his Word and his Sacraments, to depend on the uninterrupted Succession of any Office or Officer, Bishop or Presbyter, to be transmitted *from Hand to Hand*, by any necessary Forms of *Ordination*, from the Apostles Days down to ours; for then it would be impossible for any Church, or for any particular Christian, to know whether ever they have had an authentic Minister, whether they have ever received the Gospel truly, or partook of any true Sacrament, or have any just Hope of Salvation; because it is impossible for plain Christians, or even for any Ministers in our Age, so far from the Apostles, to be absolutely assured, that such *Ordinations* have been rightly transmitted through Sixteen hundred Years, without any one Interruption. And I might add, the only Evidence and Proof that any Persons pretend to have of such a Succession, is through the *Papal* Chair, which is attended with abundant Uncertainties and Impossibilities;

lities ; as has been often shewn by *Protestant* Writers.

There is another Reason also why the Ordination, or Imposition of Hands, by either Bishops or Elders, or any superior Character, cannot be absolutely necessary to make a Minister, or ordain a Pastor, in a particular Church ; and that is, that a whole Nation may be corrupted, and every Bishop and Elder therein may be departed from the Faith and Practice of the Gospel, as it was in *England* in the Days of *Popery* ; then, if a certain Number of good Men join themselves in a Church, or voluntary Society, for the Sake of Reformation, and enjoying pure Worship, they can never have a Minister settled and ordained among them, while these corrupt Clergy around them refuse their Assistance, and even forbid and oppose it to their utmost. But our blessed Lord would never leave his People, who desire Reformation, under such Circumstances of Impossibility to be reformed. There must therefore, in some Cases, be a Power of Ordination vested in the Minister and People themselves, without the absolute Necessity of Recourse to others. And this is called a *meer Independent*, or a *popular* Ordination ; as that by Bishops is called *Episcopal*, and that by Elders, *Presbyterian*.

(6.) Will it not follow, from all these Premises, that when there are no inspired Persons



Persons in a Church, and the Christian Assemblies are left to the ordinary Ways of supporting themselves from Age to Age, and of supplying themselves with Officers for their Edification, these Church-Affairs are to be conducted by such plain Rules and Dictates of the Light of Nature and common Prudence, as are mentioned before, and which, in the Days of extraordinary Gifts, were never contradicted; though those extraordinary Gifts, at that Time, might sometimes supersede the Necessity of some of these prudential Rules: Yet always keeping an Eye to the Conduct of the primitive Churches, so far as the *extraordinary* Persons and Gifts, Orders and Actions, in those Times, did not plainly interpose, to super-add any Thing above and beyond what was practicable and proper in *ordinary Cases*; and always taking Care that nothing be imposed as necessary, but what Scripture, and the plain Reason of Things, have evidently made so; and managing all other prudential Concerns by the joint Opinion and Consent of the Society itself? I think, if we act by this Rule, we cannot displease *Christ* our Lord, even tho' we should happen to mistake in some little Formalities.

(7.) Though the People in the uninspired Ages of the Church must always chuse their own Officers, and perhaps, in some uncommon Cases, may ordain them alone; yet,



yet, since in all the Rules, Directions, and Examples, which we have in the New Testament, about the Ordination or Mission of any new Officers, there is Mention made of some superior Person or Persons, Apostles or Evangelists, Elders, Prophets, or Teachers, appointing or ordaining them, or praying for them, or conferring Gifts upon them, or committing the Gospel to them, or laying Hands on them; and since there is not any one Appointment, Mission, or Ordination, either of Deacons or Ministers, that I know of, in the New Testament, without some one or more of these Things, I am ready to think this might be so far an Example to us, as that we should not too easily and readily encourage the Ordinations of new Ministers, to be performed totally and meerly by the People, without some Person or Persons of superior Characters, *i. e.* Bishops or Elders, engaged with them in this Work; except only, as was said before, in Cases of such Necessity, where the Concurrence and Assistance of such Elders as are found in the Faith, and pious in Life, could not be obtained. Tho' *popular Ordinations* may be *valid*, and may be sometimes necessary, yet it seems more *regular*, according to Scripture, to have usually the active Concurrence and Assistance of some Elders therein; and where their Assistance may be obtained, I cannot

cannot call it a *regular Ordination* without them.

(8.) And in the last Place, I would say, that since there are some Texts in the New Testament, wherein single Persons, either Apostles, as *Paul* and *Barnabas*, ordained Ministers in the Churches; or Evangelists, as *Timothy* and *Titus*; and since other Missions or Ordinations are intimated to be performed by several Persons, (*viz.*) Prophets, Teachers, Elders, or a Presbytery; as in *Acts* xiii. 1. and *1 Tim.* iv. 14. Since there is sometimes Mention made of Imposition of Hands in the Mission of a Minister, and sometimes no Mention of it; and since it is evident, that in some Cases popular Ordinations are, and must be, *valid*, without any Bishop or Elder; I think none of these Differences should be made a Matter of violent Contest among Christians; nor ought any hard Words to be pronounced against each other by those of the *Episcopal*, *Presbyterian*, or *Independent* Way. Surely all may agree thus far, that various Forms or Modes, seeming to be used in the Mission or Ordination of Ministers in primitive Times, may give a reasonable Occasion, or Colour, for sincere and honest Searchers after Truth to follow different Opinions on this Head; and do therefore demand our candid and charitable Sentiments concerning those who differ from us.

And

And indeed, the chief Ground of the Differences between all Christians in Matters of Ordination, is that wherewith I began this *Section* ; (*viz.*) that it is an uncertain Thing, whether several of these particular Modes and Actions, in the Furniture, Mission, or Ordination of a Minister, which are mentioned in the Books of the New Testament, do really belong only to the *extraordinary* Days of Inspiration, or whether they must be imitated as our Example, in all *ordinary* Occurrences of the Church ; always supposing and maintaining, that none of these Ceremonies or Assistances from other Ministers or Elders, are always and absolutely necessary to the Mission or Ordination of a new Minister ; since there may be Seasons wherein the Concurrence of good Bishops, Ministers, or Elders, cannot be obtained ; at least, not with any tolerable Conveniency, or without sending Abroad to far distant Nations.





## S E C T. IV.

*The rest of the Instances wherein Reason and Revelation agree in Matters of social Worship.*



U T it is Time now to proceed to the *Eighth Instance of Church-Affairs*, and shew how far the common Sense and Reason of Mankind concur with the Revelation of the New Testament in this Matter.

VIII. The *Light of Reason* further teaches us, that Persons who are set apart for these religious Services, and whose Time and Thoughts are to be much employed in them, that they may render public Worship useful and entertaining to the People, and who have a Charge to take Care of the Conversation of others as well as of their own, will not have much Time to spare among the Cares and Busineses of this World, to provide themselves with necessary Food and Raiment, a comfortable Subsistence, and the Con-



Conveniencies of Life; and yet it is proper they should be *honoured* and supported above the very lowest Ranks of the People, least their Ministrations be brought into Contempt by their Poverty: And upon this Account, in all Ages and in all Nations, the very Light of Reason has directed Mankind to support and maintain their Priests, or those that minister to them in Things sacred.

And does not the *New Testament* and the Authority of our Saviour, by his Apostles, decree and maintain the same Thing, 1 Cor. ix. 13, 14? *Do ye not know that they who minister about holy Things, live of the Things of the Temple, and that both in Jewish and Gentile Nations? And they which wait at the Altar are Partakers with the Altar; even so hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel.*

But let it be observed also, that tho' Christian Ministers should be so supported in temporal Things, that they may not labour under perpetual Cares and daily Anxieties, how to get Bread and Raiment for themselves and their Families, and that they may maintain their proper Authority in preaching, reproofing and exhorting, and live above the Fear or Shame that may arise from Poverty and dishonourable Dependencies, yet there is no Rule nor Example in Scripture that should raise them so far above the People in Riches or Grandeur, as to become Lords of God's Heri-



tage, or tempt them to assume sovereign Dominion over their Conscience, Faith or Practice.

IX. With regard to the Poor that happen to be joined to any religious Societies whatsoever, *Reason and Humanity* dictate to us, that they ought to be maintained by certain Contributions of their Neighbours, or the Towns and Cities wherein they dwell; for this is a Matter of civil Concernment, and a sort of natural Duty to our Fellows, as Man is a sociable Creature.

But if the civil Society or Place where they dwell, does not take Care to maintain them, and especially if they are neglected, because they do not profess the established or national Religion, Reason tells us, it is then certainly the Duty of those who are combined in that special religious Society, to take Care of their Support. For what Pretence can a Man make to serious Religion towards God, if he will not shew his Love to his Neighbour, and especially to one who loves the same God also? 1 *John* iii. 17, 18. Now that this Provision for the Poor may be managed with Regularity, Prudence, and Success, the *Light of Nature* teaches us, that one or more Persons of the Society should be chosen, to collect such charitable Contributions from the Assembly, and to distribute it with Equity, Prudence and Goodness, for the Support of the Poor?

And

SECT. IV. *agree in social Religion.* 51

And does not the *New Testament* give a plain Command, when the Care of the Poor of the Church at *Jerusalem* was too burdensome for the Apostles, or Ministers of that Congregation, to chuse out Persons for this Purpose, who were afterwards called *Deacons*, *Acts vi*? When *some of the Widows were neglected in the daily Ministration*, or charitable Supply, then the *twelve Apostles said to the Multitude of the Disciples*, *It is not Reason that we should leave the Word of God and serve Tables.*—Wherefore, Brethren, look you out among you Men of honest Report, full of the Holy Ghost and of Wisdom\*, whom we may

\* It is granted that the Deacons then chosen at *Jerusalem* had extraordinary Gifts. *Stephen* was a noble Speaker, and might occasionally teach the Gospel, *Philip* also was either a Preacher then, or might use the Office of a Deacon well, and so grow up to an Evangelist. *Acts vi. 3, 8. and vii. 2, &c. and ix. 5.* and thus have Power to baptize *v. 38.* as is intimated in *1 Tim. iii. 13.* But these Powers or Gifts did not arise from their Office as Deacons. Some of them had these Gifts before, in common with Multitudes of Converts in the primitive Times: And these Gifts might perhaps fit them the better to discern, who were proper Persons to be supported out of the Churches Stock, and to give a Word in Season occasionally to the Poor, of whom they had the Care. But the meer Office of Deacons, which consists in assisting the Ministers to take Care of feeding the Poor, and of laying out the publick Money continues, when these extraordinary Gifts are ceased, and the Characters of Persons, fit to be chosen do not necessarily include publick preaching: Nor do we find *διδάσκων* or *Aptness to teach*, mentioned among the Characters of a Deacon.

*appoint over this Business. And when they had chosen them, they set them before the Apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid their Hands on them.* There are also particular Directions given, what sort of Persons should be chosen to this Office of Deacons; their Characters are written down at large, 1 *Tim.* iii. 8. &c. because it was designed to be a standing Office in the Christian Church through all Ages.

As the *Deacons* are Persons appointed by the New Testament, to take Care of the Money collected by the Church, for the Supply of the Table of the Poor, so the same Persons are very naturally and properly employed in christian Churches, to take Care also of all other Contributions of the Society, for the Supply of the Table of the Minister, and of the Lord's Table at the Holy Communion. With them also are entrusted other necessary Expences and outward Accommodations that belong to publick Worship.

X. I add yet further, the *Light of Nature and Reason* teach us, that all the Management of religious Affairs in a Society should be performed with a *Decency* and *Dignity* becoming the Things of God; and with due *Regularity* and *Order*, for he is a God of Order; with Gentleness also and Condescension, Peace and Love, for Quarrels and Fightings, destroy Religion, and break all the Bonds of religious Society.

And

And are we not taught the same Things in the *New Testament*? Are not Christians continually called upon to *put on Charity, which is the Bond of Perfection*, Coloss. iii. 14. *to do all Things without Disputings and Murmuring*, Phil. ii. 4. *to do all their Things with Charity*, 1 Cor. xvi. 14. *And that all Things should be done with Decency and in Order*, 1 Cor. xiv. 40? And that as they ought to keep Peace at Home and in the *Church of Christ*, they should give no Offence neither to *Jews nor Gentiles*, but as far as possible live peaceably with all Men. 1 Cor. x. 32. Rom. xii. 18.

In the *last Place*, the *Light of Nature and Reason* also acquaints us, that when Persons who belong to one religious Society travel to distant Places, they should have some Recommendations by Epistles to other Societies, which are built upon the same religious Principles, that they may be received into their Assemblies, and enjoy all the Parts and Privileges of Worship and friendly Society together with them? This is called *occasional Communion*, to distinguish it from that *fixed and constant Communion*, which the agreed Members of the same religious Society constantly enjoy.

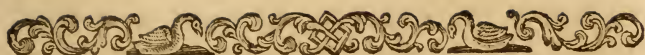
And here also the *New Testament* very happily concurs with the Dictates of Reason and common Prudence: For when primitive Christians were called by Providence to a Di-



stance from their own dwelling, and from that Church with which they usually worshipped, they were recommended by Letters unto other Christian Churches in the World, that they might be received by them into all the Parts of Christian Fellowship. Such Epistles St. *Paul* speaks off 2 *Cor.* iii. 1. he needed them not, though others stood in Need of them: And such a Recommendation had *Phebe*, a Member of the Church at *Cenchrea*, when she travelled to *Rome*. *Rom.* xvi. 1, 2. *I recommend unto you Phebe our Sister, who is a Servant of the Church of Cenchrea, that you receive her in the Lord, as becometh Saints.* And such a commendatory Letter was written by the Brethren of *Ephesus*, to commend *Apollos* to be received by the Churches of *Achaia*. *Acts* xviii. 27. *The Brethren wrote, exhorting the Disciples to receive him.*







## S E C T. V.

*Where Revelation is silent, Reason  
must direct.*



HUS we have seen a Variety of Instances, wherein the Rules of *Christianity and Scripture*, so far as relates to social Religion, correspond with those which the *Light of Reason and Prudence* would dictate to wise and sober Men, engaged in a religious Society. Some of these are represented to us in the New Testament, as express Commands ; others we may draw by easy Reasonings from the Examples of the Apostles and the primitive Churches, as well as from the Circumstances which are contained, either in the Matters of Fact or in the Exhortations that relate to them.

And here I would observe, that tho' right Reason might guide us into most of the same Practices, yet it is a vast Advantage to us that we have so many of these Things prescribed, intimated or approved by the inspired Writings of the New Testament: For so imperfect is our Understanding, and so weak our Judgement, that the Reasonings of Men,

even of a single Congregation, or their Humours which go for Reason, would not easily agree in the same Methods and Forms of Management, and there would probably be a far greater Variety of Opinions, and greater Difficulties in the Conduct of Church Affairs, than now there are; though even now there are so many, that render the Christian World a Theatre of perpetual Contest: But it must still be acknowledged that one main Spring of the Controversy is, because the Passions and Pride and Interests of Men, will not suffer them to hearken either to Reason or Scripture.

Tho' Scripture hath determined so many Particulars in a perfect Conformity to right Reason, yet it must be confessed there are other Things which relate to Christian Worship and Order, which are past over in Silence, or at least, are not mentioned and prescribed with such Plainness and Evidence in the Word of God, as is sufficient to direct every single Punctilio of our Practice. It is the Pretence of finding out in Scripture every lesser particular Piece of Conduct in a *Christian* Church, even such as belongs to all religious Societies, that has tempted men to run to the *Old Testament*, and enquire of *Moses* and *Aaron* for Advice, where they could not find it expressly written in the *New*, and strangely to warp and pervert many Texts  
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of the New Testament from their native and proper Meaning.

Let it be granted then, that Scripture is silent in some little Particulars about social Religion: But even here we are not left without any Direction, nor are we sent to uncertain Traditions to make up for the Silence of Scripture, but we are naturally remitted to the common Reason of Things and human Prudence as our Guide\*. Yet always, as I said before,

\* *The Sufficiency and Perspicuity of the Scripture in Things necessary to Salvation*, is not at all impeached by this Concession; for (1.) The Determinations of some lesser Affairs relating to publick Worship, or the Conduct of Christian Societies, are not Things necessary to the Salvation of any particular Person, or to the Essence or Being of a Christian Church, though they may be needful to its well-being and its comfortable and regular Subsistence. (2.) When Scripture is said to be *sufficiently full and clear in all Things necessary to Salvation*, this doth not mean to exclude the common Exercise of the Reason and Prudence of Men, in order to apply the general Directions of Scripture to particular Cases which occur, even in Things which are necessary to Salvation. As for instance: Scripture bids us *do good and relieve the Poor*: But it doth not tell us how many Poor we must relieve, whether two, or twenty, or two hundred, nor whether for one Day or many, &c. This must be determined by the particular Circumstances of every Christian, and by the Exercise of his Reason and Prudence, upon the special Occasions and Objects which appear. Again, Scripture requires of us to *deny ourselves* and to *mortify our Appetites and Passions*: But it leaves it to the Reason and Prudence of every Christian, in what Things, at what Seasons, in what Manner, and in what Degree this must be done, and how far we must go in mortifying all Passion and Appetite, or in acting

before, keeping our Eye pointed toward the New Testament, and forming our Reasonings as far as possible on the same Principles which seem to run thro' the social Religion of the primitive Times, so far as it did not depend on those *extraordinary* Inspirations. Let us give also some Instances of these.

I. *Scripture* does not tell us how many Persons must go to make up a Christian Church: But *Reason* will help us to answer this Question, if we consider that the Word *Ecclesie* or *Church*, properly signifies an *Assembly of People*, and so it is used in the New Testament, where it has no Relation to a Christian Society, as among the Heathens at *Ephesus*, Acts xix. 32, 39, 40. A very few therefore may be called an *Assembly*, and may be sufficient to join together in Christian Fellowship, that they may partake of the Lord's Supper, and carry on the Face of publick Religion, when there are no other Christians in the Place where they dwell. And on the

acting Self-denial, since it is certain we are not called to root out every Passion, to resist every Appetite, nor to deny every natural Inclination. Thus the Honour of Scripture is still secured, both as to its *Perfection* and its *Perspicuity in Things necessary to Salvation*, though in many lesser Particulars, and in the Application of general Rules to actual Practice, we are forced to recur to the Exercise of human Reason and common Prudence, both in Things of greater and lesser Importance in the Christian Life. The Scripture supposes us to be rational Creatures, when it teaches us to be Christians.

other



other Hand, there should usually be no more in a Church than can meet together in one Place, can act as one Assembly and join in social Worship, in Prayers and Praises; for the Apostle writing to the *Corinthians*, speaks twice of the *whole Church coming together in one Place*, 1 Cor. v. 4. xi. 20. and xiv. 23. And the Church of *Antioch* which was large met all together, *Acts* xiv. 27. Perhaps those Words *Rom.* xv. 6. *that ye may with one Mind and one Mouth glorify God*, may limit the Number of a Church, usually to so many as can join in Attention and suitable Meditation, while one Mouth speaks in a Way of Instruction, Prayer or Praise. Such probably were the Churches of *Asia* and *Galatia*, and in several Towns or Cities of which the New Testament gives an Account.\* But sometimes the Word *Church* is applied, to a very small or a very large Number.

The Word *Εκκλησία* or *Church*, sometimes signifies a few Christians in a House; so the Church in the House of *Priscilla* and *Aquila*, is saluted by St. *Paul* in his Epistle to the

\* There was a sort of Union even of all the *Jewish* national Church in one Place three Times a Year, by the Congress of all the Males who were Representatives of the Nation at *Jerusalem*; and perhaps they might join in the Solemnity of some Sacrifices by the Aid of loud Instruments of Musick in the Temple, according to the figurative Worship of the *Levitical* Dispensation, so that they made one huge Congregation worshipping together, or at least successively in the several Days of the Festival.

*Romans*; and the same Church salutes the *Corinthians* in the End of St. Paul's first Epistle to them, though it is certain there were many more Christians round about them in *Rome*. Very probably Dr. *Whitby's* Sense is just on these Scriptures, (*viz.*) that this Phrase is used concerning such whole Families as were Converts to the Christian Faith. And, besides, Christians might meet together by Agreement, in lesser Societies for any spiritual Occasions, and every such Society might sometimes be called a *Church* or a Christian Assembly. Common Prudence thought ten Men enough to make a Synagogue among the *Jews*. Our Saviour says, *Where two or three are gathered together in his Name, there he is, or will be in the Midst of them*. But this does not prove plainly that there should be a Church formed where there are but two or three Christians: Prudence must direct in this Matter, since Scripture is silent.

But on the other Hand, we may enquire how large may a Church be? The Multitude of *Christians in Jerusalem*, Acts xv. 12. are called the *Church at Jerusalem*, ver. 22. and Acts xi. 22. Not that it is necessary to suppose all the three Thousand who were converted, Acts ii. 41. and all the five Thousand, Acts iv. 4. to be Members of the Church at *Jerusalem*; for this being done in the Days of Pentecost, Multitudes of *Jews* and *Proselytes* were come from other Nations to celebrate

lebrate that Festival, as *Acts* ii. 9. who being converted, returned to their own Home. And it seems evident from the History, that when the *Apostles, Elders, and Brethren* were met together at *Jerusalem*, to determine the Question about Circumcision, *the whole Church together with the Apostles and Elders* wrote the Letter and sent Messengers with it to *Antioch*. *Acts* xv. 22, 23. So that it is possible one Place might hold them, and they might make but one Assembly.

But supposing they were too numerous to meet together in Worship at once, especially in a Time of Persecution, they might divide themselves into smaller Assemblies, for preaching and praying, and might *break Bread from House to House*, if that Phrase should signify the Celebration of the Lord's Supper. *Acts* ii. 42, 46.

Let it be further observed, that if the *Church at Jerusalem* at that Time was too large for one worshipping Assembly, Christian Churches were but a forming at that Time, and might not be absolutely formed and settled in the most perfect and convenient Methods, for regular Continuance and Edification. Human Affairs can proceed but by degrees, by reason of our Weakness, even though they be conducted by divine Inspiration.

Or perhaps, as all the *Christians* in the World are sometimes called the Church, so  
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all who were in one City, may be called *the Church in that City*, and the *Christians* in one House may be called *the Church in that House*, though they were not united by any other Bond of Agreement, but that of their common Christianity. Yet I believe it will be found, that a *Christian Church* in its most usual Form was made up of so many, as could conveniently meet together for Worship, and consented to do so; and the Reason of Things seems to make this most convenient for many Purposes of Edification and mutual Help.

II. Scripture is silent how any of the lesser or circumstantial Affairs of Worship or Order, should be finally determined in a Church, when there are some of the Members of different Sentiments, and make an Opposition. But the *Light of Reason and common Prudence* teach us, that in such Affairs which God has left to the Determination of Men, such as the appointing the Place and the Hour of Worship, chusing a Minister, or the like, the major Part of the Assembly must determine it by their Vote, and the lesser Part ought to acquiesce, where it is not contrary to the Dictates of their Conscience, their Edification in Faith and Holiness, or their reasonable Conveniency. But if the lesser Part solemnly declare, they cannot comply therewith, they may peaceably depart to another Society  
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of Christians, who may be more entirely of their Mind, for there must be no Imposition; yet the major Part may surely act for themselves.

May I have Leave to add this further also, that if the Society shall agree to have nothing determined in a Church, without a Vote of two Thirds of the Members, I do not see it unlawful to make this Agreement: And perhaps if this were generally practised it might tend to the greater Unanimity and Peace of Churches, because in any Debate the Dissenters would be the fewer\*.

III. The *New Testament* is very silent about the Combination of particular Congregations, by some common Band of Union to make one national Church. What does the *Light of Nature* teach us in this Point?

I answer, There never was but one national Church of God's own Appointment; that was the Church of the *Jews*; and he himself saw fit to dissolve it; nor has he given Men any revealed Order or Authority

\* The Conclave of *Cardinals* at *Rome*, who are supposed to have the Wisdom of this World in Perfection, never will chuse a *Pope* till two Thirds of them are agreed in the same Person: And hereby they keep the whole Hierarchy and System of that *Antichristian* Building and Government in greater Unanimity and Peace. Why may not Christians learn the Wisdom of the Serpent from the Men of this World, so long as they do but maintain the Innocence of the Dove?

from

from himself to raise and establish another : Yet certainly the *Light of Nature* may sometimes direct and lead many Christian Congregations, even all that are in a County or in a Nation, who agree in the necessary Articles of Christianity, to combine together and agree to assist each other many Ways by Counsel, Encouragement, and Support, in the Maintenance of their sacred Religion, always in a Consistency with due Allegiance preserved to their civil Governors. The Churches in a County or any particular District, may agree to send their Ministers to consult together about their common Welfare : They may chuse one Person to transact Matters of publick and common Concern for all the Congregations in a County, and may bestow on him the Name of an *Overseer*, a *Superintendent*, or a *Bishop* ; and so all the Churches in a Nation may desire their own Ministers, or they may desire these their Representatives or Overseers, to join themselves in a common Assembly or Council for the publick Care of their Liberty, or Security of their Peace, or Advice in Matters of Consequence relating to their particular Churches. And this Assembly may chuse a *President*, and may call him their chief *Overseer* or their *Archbishop* ; as I see nothing unlawful in all this, so neither do I see any ordinary Necessity for it.

I add further, that many particular Churches, by their Ministers, Deputies or Messengers,  
met

met together, may contrive and agree in what Manner to carry on the Work of Preaching, Catechising, Expounding, Prayer, or Psalmody; they may consult what Subjects are chiefly necessary to be insisted on in preaching, at special Seasons and Occasions; what Psalms or Hymns to be sung, and how often Psalmody to be repeated in a Day; what Days or Hours may be set apart for Prayer and Humiliation, or Thanksgiving, on special Occasions of Danger, or Deliverance, &c. And if these Things be agreed with much Unanimity, by many wise and pious Men, met together, by the Request of the Churches, for this Purpose; and these Matters be determined, so as plainly tends to the common Safety and Edification of the whole Number of Churches in a Country or a Nation, the particular Churches which are there, and especially particular Persons in any such Church, according to the common Rules of Society, should usually consent and agree to such publick, and almost unanimous Agreements, of their Deputies in these Matters, unless they can shew some very plain and considerable Reason against it. Reason itself, or the Light of Nature, dictates this, that a very few Persons should not humourously set themselves against such a general Agreement in Things which are in themselves indifferent; and which are left undetermined by the New Testament; and which must be

determined some Way or other by the Agreement of Christians.

But still I think it must be maintained, that though all the Churches in a Nation should be united and combined in this Manner by their Representatives, and call themselves *one national Church*, they could acquire no divine Right or Authority hereby, to impose any new Doctrines or Practices in Religion, any Creed, or Articles, or Canons, or Rules of Worship, of their own making, on any particular Church or Person whatsoever, without their own Consent. Neither the Light of Nature, nor the New Testament, so far as I can find, has given them any such Power.

IV. Scripture is also supposed to be silent how far the Power and Government of *Elders*, or *Bishops*, may extend, though it calls them sometimes *Rulers*, and requires the Church to obey. Heb. xiii. 7. *Remember them who have the Rule over you, who have spoken to you the Word of God.* And Ver. 17. *Obey them who have the Rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your Souls.* May they not therefore invent new Ceremonies of Worship, and by their Authority determine any of those Matters in a Christian Society, which *Christ* has left undetermined in his Word?

I answer,



I *answer*, If Scripture be silent herein, let all Church-Rulers take Heed that they extend not this Power beyond the actual Commission or Grant of Scripture, It is always safer in Points of Dominion, to confine one's-self within the Limits of the express Grant or Commission, than to go ever so little beyond it. When our natural Ambition would tempt us to exceed these Limits, our Awe and Dread of invading the Province of *Christ*, should be an everlasting Restraint.

Besides, when neither the Light of Reason nor Scripture gives sufficient Evidence of any Authority to assume such a Power, why should it be assumed? Reason tells us, that no Man knows what Rites or Ceremonies will be pleasing to the great God, beyond the plain Dictates of natural Religion, unless God himself has revealed and required them.

The great and blessed God, when he would be worshipped with a Variety of outward Rites, established a Church in *Judea*, with an hundred Ceremonies, and new Forms of Worship and Order; but he thought fit to abolish them again when the *Messiah* brought in his more spiritual Kingdom, *i. e.* the *Christian Church*. Now therein there are but two such Ceremonies, of most plain and evident divine Appointment; *i. e.* *Baptism* and the *Lord's Supper*; or, if you will, add the Observation of the *Lord's Day*. And

it is not to be supposed, that God would abolish and destroy an hundred Ceremonies of his own Institution, and give the Fancies of Men Leave to invent a new Scheme of ceremonial Worship at their own Pleasure, and impose new-invented Rites upon their Fellow-Christians; especially when we are required to *stand fast in the Liberty wherewith Christ has now made us free, and not to be entangled with Yokes of Bondage.* Gal. v. 1. What a strange Medley of superstitious and ridiculous Fooleries would be introduced into Christian Worship, if the Elders or Rulers in any Ages of the Church, might invent Ceremonies at their Pleasure, and impose them on the People? The Church of *Rome*, by this Means, is become a Theatre of *Jewish* and *Heathen* Pageantry, to the great Dishonour of God, the Reproach of *Christianity*, and the Hazard and Ruin of the Souls of Men.

It will be replied here, But is not some Power of Rule and Government still given to Judges in a Nation, and to Magistrates in a City, notwithstanding the unhappy Consequences which may arise from the Abuse of this Power. The Abuse of Authority does not prove there is no such Authority: Even so in Churches, the Power may be abused; yet surely, there must be some Persons who have Power and Authority, Rule and Government, lodged in their Hands, even since  
the

the Days of Inspiration and extraordinary Commission ; for without it, every Society will run into great Disorder and Confusion. Pray what is this *Rule* or *Power of Government*, which is granted to ordinary Ministers in a Christian Church ; and wherein does it consist, if not in appointing such Things as *Christ* has left indifferent ?

To this I answer ; The Rule and Government which is committed to *ordinary* Ministers in the Church, so far as I can understand it, seems to consist in these Things following ; (*viz.*) in going before the People, and leading the several Parts of their Worship, and becoming their Example in every Duty ; in teaching them the Principles and Rules of their Religion ; the Knowledge, Profession, and Practice of those Doctrines and Duties, that Worship and Order, which Reason and natural Religion dictates, and that which *Christ* himself has revealed, super-added, and established in his Word : It consists in exhorting, persuading, and charging the Hearers with Solemnity in the Name and Authority of *Christ*, to comply therewith ; in instructing the People how to apply those general Principles and Rules to particular Cases and Occurrences, and giving them their best Advice ; in presiding in their Assemblies, and particularly as to the Admission and Exclusion of Members : It consists in watching over the Flock ; in guarding

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them

them against Errors and Dangers; in admonishing, and warning, and reproving, with all Gravity and Authority, those who neglect or oppose any of the Rules of *Christ*. But I cannot find where our blessed Lord has given them any Power, or Pretence of Power, to impose on Conscience any such Advices of their own, which neither Reason nor Revelation impose; much less to impose any of their own Inventions of new Doctrines, or Duties; or so much as their own peculiar Explications of the Words of *Christ*, by their own Authority. When our Saviour gave Commission to his Disciples, or his Apostles, to *preach the Gospel to all Nations*, it was in this Manner: *Go, teach them to observe* (not whatsoever you shall command, but) *whatsoever I have commanded you*. Matt. xxviii. 20.

It is granted indeed, the Apostles had Authority to explain the Meaning of *Christ* to the Churches by Inspiration; but even they were not entrusted to invent any new Doctrines or Laws of their own, and impose them upon Men.

And as these inspired Persons have communicated to the Churches all that *Christ* designed, we must rest there. And since *Christ* is the only Lord of his own Church, whose Wisdom is infallible, and whose Power and Authority are unquestionable, it is very unreasonable to suppose that he should leave any Part of the Doctrines or Duties of Christianity



Christianity to be invented, or imposed upon his Churches, by Men, whose best Wisdom and Knowledge are weak, and fallible, and uncertain; and their Authority so doubtful and questionable, or rather so null and void, as to any Inventions and Impositions of their own.

Alas, What wretched Work would such a supposed Authority make in different Churches, in the same Age? What Contentions, and endless Confusions, would be raised among Christians? What different and contrary Opinions, and Ceremonies, and Forms of Worship and Practice, would be imposed on distinct Churches, and all called by the Christian Name? Has not the whole Church of *Christ* suffered infinite Damage by these Pretences?

What Mischiefs, and Strifes, and Schisms, would arise in the same Churches, by the different Sentiments and Injunctions of different Elders or Pastors in the same Church? What eternal Innovations in Churches, as to their Faith, Worship, and Practice, when Pastors die successively, and others, of different Principles, come in their room? Has not the World seen too much of this already, in every Age of the Church?

Observe with what Zeal St. *Paul*, the greatest of the Apostles, exclaims against any such Sort of Power, even in himself and his Fellow-Teachers. *What is Paul, or what is*

Apollos, or what is Cephas, or Peter, but Servants, or Ministers, by whom ye were taught to believe the same Gospel, or the same Religion and Institutions of *Christ*. 1 Cor. i. 12. and iii. 5. *We are far from being Lords of your Faith: We are only the Helpers of your Joy.* 2 Cor. i. 24.

As for the lesser Things, which *Christ* has not commanded, and which are necessary to be determined some Way or other in a Church, as in any other human Society; such as the Appointment of the Place and Hour of meeting, the chusing a President, the Method and Order of their religious Exercises, &c. These must be agreed, or at least consented to, by the Society itself. A Judge in a Court, or a Magistrate in a City, has no Power to make any new Law: His Business is only to explain and apply in general the Laws that are made, according to the best of his Understanding: And, after all, it is a Jury of twelve Men, in our national Courts of Justice, that determines the Affair with Regard to particular Things or Persons. So Ministers in the Church are not Lords or Sovereigns in *Christ's* Kingdom: They, in their highest Character, can be supposed to be set up but as Judges, to explain his Laws, and apply them to rising Occasions, and shew Men how to do all Things decently and orderly; but in many Cases of Church-Affairs, it is the People that must actually apply them to particular

ticular Persons or Occurrences. Ministers have not any *Dominion* given them, either over our *Faith* or Practice.

It may be observed also, that the Names which are given to Ministers in Scripture, do not signify sovereign Rule and Authority : Their Name is *Ministers*, or *Servants*, and they are never called *Lords*, or *Commanders*, but *Leaders*, *Presidents*, *Stewards*, *Shepherds*, *Teachers*, *Elders*, *Overseers*, &c. all which intimate a limited Authority, and not supreme Power \*.

But as many Writers among the *Puritans* and *Nonconformists* have handled this Matter abundantly in the last Age, so the Reverend and Learned Bishop *Hoadley*, in latter Years, has happily laboured to guard this Prerogative of *Christ* to make Laws in his own Church, from the Usurpations of Men ; and therefore I insist no further on this particular.

\* *Governments* is the strongest Word of Authority used to denote any Office in the Christian Church, and that is but one. *1 Cor.* xii. 28. And some learned Men are of Opinion, this Name signifies *Deacons*, whose Government reached not to the Faith or Conscience, but they distributed and disposed of the Money wisely, which the *Helps* just before mentioned, *i. e.* Men of Wealth and Goodness, gave toward the Support of the Poor. See Mr. *Chandler's* Comment. on *Joel*, P. 150. Or if these *Governments* imply high Authority and Power, let it be remembered, it is only mentioned as an Office in the Days of Inspiration, and is joined with *Apostles*, *Prophets*, *Evangelists*, *Gifts of Tongues*, &c.

V. Though the Scripture be silent about the Extent of the *Power of particular Bishops or Elders* in a Church, yet some may say, Does not the Light of Nature teach us, that many grave and wise Persons, the Bishops and Elders of many Churches, meeting together in a Synod, or solemn Council, may join and make Laws, or Constitutions, for all the Churches under their Care? And are not the Churches bound to obey?

First, I answer, It is granted, that the Light of Nature would lead the wisest Persons sometimes to meet together for mutual Advice and Counsel; but I know not of any natural or scriptural Right, that Ministers, joined in a Synod, have to make new Laws for Christian Churches; nor have single Christians or Congregations any Right or Leave, much less any Obligation, to subject themselves and their Consciences to such a Dominion of Men, in Things which neither Scripture nor Nature requires. It is the ready Way, by Degrees, to put other Kings into the Kingdom of *Christ*, who alone is Sovereign in his Church. It is a dangerous Thing for Christians to give up themselves to the Will of fallible Men by such a Subjection; and they will find, by woeful Experience, many Things, by Degrees, imposed upon them, that will neither suit with their Conscience or their Conveniency, with  
their



their own Inclination, or their faithful Subjection to *Christ*: What has been the Event of this in all Ages may justly be again expected, if the same Experiment be made.

*I answer*, 2dly, If this were once allowed, may not these Ministers, thus met together in one Nation, upon the same Principle, depute some of their Number to join with such Sort of Deputation of Christian Ministers in other Nations, till at last they devolve all their Power upon one small Assembly or general Council, or upon one single Person, who may be deputed or appointed to determine for them all? If these Sort of Deputations carry any authentick Power with them, to make Laws for Conscience, they may be carried on as far as an universal Council, or a *Pope*, before they stop, and we are at *Rome* e're we are aware.

You will reply, perhaps, Is there not some Encouragement given to the Government of the Church by Assemblies, Councils, Convocations, or Synods of Bishops or Elders, in that famous Chapter, *Acts* xv. where they met about that great Question, *Whether the Heathen Converts should be circumcised or no?*

But the Answer to this is very easy: This was not a Council of Elders or Bishops, for here are the Brethren of the Church at *Jerusalem* joined together with the Apostles and Elders; and besides, that Assembly had so much of the extraordinary Gifts of the Spirit of God in them, that they could justly pro-

pronounce, *It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us, to lay upon you no greater Burthen, &c.* Now when Persons divinely inspired, as those Apostles and Elders, and many of the Brethren were, shall meet together for such a Purpose, I have nothing to say against their Determinations. But let Ministers in their Councils, in later Ages, take Heed how they assume Lordship over Conscience, till they are furnished with such Gifts, and can make such a divine Commission appear, as will warrant them to say, *It appeared good to the Holy Ghost and to us, to appoint so and so.*

Perhaps it will be replied here, The Apostles and inspired Persons knew what was the Christians Duty before, and *could have determined this Question* by their extraordinary Gifts, without convening in a Council or Synod; but *probably* the Providence of God so ordered it, that even inspired Apostles should meet, and debate this Point in a Synod, on Purpose to teach all succeeding Churches what is to be done in such a Case, and to shew how their Difficulties and Controversies should be authoritatively determined by Synods, even to the End of the World.

*Ans.* 1. And I have as much Right to say, Perhaps the Apostles *Peter* and *James*, &c. did not know this Matter so well before, and therefore *could not have determined this Question* without convening in a Council; for their divine Revelations of many particular Things were

were made to them not all at once, in the Days of *Pentecost*, when the Holy Spirit came upon them; but this was done by Degrees, and at particular Seasons, as the Occasions of Christianity and the Churches required it. *Peter* did not know that he must preach the Gospel to the *Heathens* several Years after that Day of *Pentecost*, when the Holy Spirit fell upon them in cloven Tongues, till a Vision from Heaven taught it him, when *Cornelius* was directed by an Angel to send Messengers to call him to *Cæsarea*. And it is probable, God ordained this Council to be called, not only to teach the Church at *Jerusalem*, as well as the Apostles, a full Answer to the Question in Dispute, but to render the unanimous Direction and Appointment of so many inspired Persons more publick, more weighty, and efficacious, than the Voice of a single Apostle would have been in so important a Case of Controversy between the *Jewish* and *Gentile* Converts.

*Ans.* 2. I will allow that Providence, perhaps, might appoint this Council of wise and knowing Men at *Jerusalem* to be convened, to teach the following Churches and Ages what they should do in Cases of Doubt and Difficulty; *i. e.* that they should meet together, and advise with one another, and debate Matters freely and sincerely, according to that great Rule of human Prudence which *Solomon* also teaches us; *In the Multitude of Counsellors*

*Counsellors there is Safety.* And great Defe-  
 rence should be paid to the Advice of many  
 aged, learned, and pious Men, met in Coun-  
 cil. But if no inspired Men are among  
 them, they can only draw up their Conclu-  
 sion thus ; *It seemed good to us* (fallible Men)  
*to give our Opinion or Advice so or so* ; but  
 not to determine absolutely for other Persons,  
 and make Rules to bind the Consciences of  
 others, unless they could add, *It seemed good*  
*to the Holy Spirit also, as well as unto us* ; for  
 if the Vote of a Council of fallible Men  
 could bind us, why should not the Council  
 of *Trent*, or any other Councils, bind us to  
 all their Antichristian Decrees ? The best  
 constituted Church or Council may in Time  
 grow degenerate, and if they have such Au-  
 thority given them, they may make *Heathen-*  
*ish* or *Hellish* Decrees, and bind them on the  
 Consciences of Men.

And yet further, in the third Place, I add,  
 If this Decree at *Jerusalem* had not been the  
 Direction and Determination of the Holy  
 Spirit, by the Lips of inspired Men, why  
 should the Churches at *Antioch*, *Syria*, and  
*Cilicia* (*Acts* xv. 23.) submit to a Vote or  
 Opinion of the Church at *Jerusalem*, any  
 more than the Church at *Jerusalem* should  
 submit to an Opinion of the Church at *Co-*  
*rinth*, or *Rome*, or *Antioch* ? What was  
 done at *Jerusalem* by inspired Men once, on  
 an extraordinary Occasion, cannot be made a  
 binding



binding Example or Rule, for the Determination of Conscience in all following Times, and in ordinary Church-Affairs, where no inspired Persons are present ; for by this Precedent, one Church would have Power given it to determine for another ; which I know no Church pretends to, but that of *Rome*.

And finally, It is plain, if this Scripture give Authority to uninspired Men in ordinary Cases, it gives this Dominion to the *whole Church at Jerusalem*, and not to the Bishops or Elders only ; for this was not a Council made up of the Elders, Bishops, or Representatives of the Churches of *Jerusalem*, *Antioch*, *Syria*, and *Cilicia*, but of the Apostles, Elders, and Brethren of the Church at *Jerusalem* ; and yet they authoritatively determined the Case for the Churches of the *Gentiles*, which they should never have done, if there had been no Apostles or inspired Persons there.

Whatsoever therefore the Church at *Jerusalem* determined as a Duty for the *Gentile* Churches to practise in a dubious Case, because it had Apostles, and many inspired Persons in it, can be no sufficient Authority for Synods, Convocations, or Councils of Bishops or *Elders* of modern Churches, to determine other dubious Cases, for their own or other Congregations, and bind their Consciences to any Point of Faith or Practice merely by their Authority, when they have no inspired Persons among them. But I only  
glance

glance at these Things, and will not enter into a Debate about them at present.

VI. Though Baptism and the Lord's Supper are Ceremonies of divine Institution, yet is not the *New Testament* in a great Measure silent as to the Persons who shall celebrate them ?

I answer, The *Scripture* acquaints us, that the Commission to baptize was plainly given here to those who were appointed to *teach the Nations*. Matth. xxviii. 20. And the *Light of Nature* shews us, that those Persons who are furnished with Talents, and chosen, and called, and solemnly appointed to preach the Gospel to Men, to offer up their Prayers and Praises to God, and to lead the Worship in Churches, are certainly, in the Nature of Things, the most proper Persons to administer or celebrate such Rites or Ordinances, as should be attended with the Word and Prayer ; for *by the Word and Prayer is every Thing sanctified* to its proper Purposes in the Kingdom of *Christ*.

And yet, if no Ministers, Elders, or Bishops, are near at Hand, nor the Ministrations of any such are to be obtained, without sinful Compliances, perhaps it may be better that some private Member of that Congregation, if sufficiently furnished with proper Gifts, should be deputed or desired by the Church, to perform these Solemnities once or  
twice,

twice, than that these Institutions of *Christ*, which are so plain and express, should be omitted for a long Time together, merely on Account of doubtful Disputables. *Christ* has most expressly commanded this Duty; but who shall administer this Ordinance, and how Ministers should be ordained, is much more obscure. If a Congregation want a regular Minister, yet the Church should assemble for Prayer; and Exhortation or teaching, by reading or preaching, should not be utterly neglected: Why then should they neglect the Lord's Supper? If a neighbouring Minister cannot conveniently be obtained, may not a Brother of the Congregation, who has competent Abilities, be desired to pray, or to read a Sermon, or to exhort, rather than the Church be without any publick Worship, or spend their Lord's-Days at Home, and that for Weeks or Months together, for a considerable Time? And may not a Person thus qualified, if no Minister be within Reach, be deputed, or called by the Church, to break Bread to them, rather than live without obeying the express Commands of a dying Saviour.

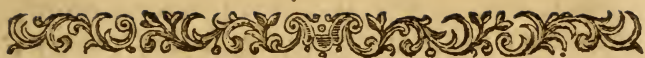
Now I have ventured so far in giving my Opinion here, I may the more confidently add, that this should not be practised on every little common Occasion, lest great Inconveniences arise thereby: And for this Reason, every destitute Church should furnish

themselves, as soon as may be, with a Pastor or Minister of their own, to go before them, and, in a regular Manner, celebrate these divine Rites of Christianity, which ought not to be long neglected.

Some other Cases might be mentioned, which may fall out in a Christian Church, wherein we can find no plain Direction or Example in Scripture; and then Reason and Prudence must direct us: Where Revelation is silent, Reason is our Guide,







## S E C T. VI.

*Christian Churches formed like Civil Societies, upon the plain Nature and Reason of Things.*



ERMIT me here to give a little Specimen, by Way of Similitude, how naturally a *Christian Church* is formed, when we suppose there are several Christians within the Reach and Knowledge of one another, in this sinful World. It is raised in the same Manner as any other civil Society may be formed among Men, especially among several Natives of one Country meeting together in a foreign Land : And while I am representing their Procedure, you may carry your Thoughts of the Formation and Constitution of a Christian Church along with you in the *Simile*, and apply it all the Way.

Suppose three or four *Englishmen*, who have their Residence in a City of *China*, happen to meet one another, and by Conversation, finding that they speak the same Lan-

guage, they make it known to each other, that they are Natives of the same Country; they all profess Allegiance to the same King, *George the Second*; and, though they sojourn for a Season in a foreign Land, and are engaged in many secular Affairs there, yet they declare their Resolution to behave as becomes *Englishmen*, while they are waiting for a Call from their Sovereign to return Home. They hereupon agree to meet once a Week, in Order to converse about the Affairs of their own Nation, to learn some Tydings from it, to pay some special Honours to their absent King; to learn further Notices of his Will, and to prepare for their Return Homeward.

The Day which they appoint for their Assembly, is the Day of the Accession of their King to the Throne, in its weekly Return: The Place is also agreed among them, such as may be convenient for their frequent Attendance.

Other *Englishmen*, who are in that City, hearing of this Society, come to their Assembly, one after another, and desire Acquaintance with their Countrymen and Brethren: They make it appear, that they are Natives of the same Land, that they own the same Sovereign, that they are doing his Will, and preparing to return Home at his Orders: And, in the mean Time, they desire the Privilege of being admitted into their Society. Upon such a Profession, and by  
the

the Approbation of the Society, they are received into this *English* Fellowship with Pleasure.

Now it is not to be supposed, that every one of them is capable of taking proper Care of the best Interests of this Society, nor of speaking in an instructive and profitable Manner concerning the Things that relate to their native Country, their Laws, and Rules of Conduct ; their King, and their common Design of a Return. They agree therefore to chuse one Person amongst them, who shall devote himself to this Work, shall study the Laws of their Country, the Rules of the proper Behaviour of *Englishmen*, and the Mind and Will of their King : One who shall present their common Allegiance to their Sovereign, in frequent Addresses sent to *England*, and shall spend an Hour or two every Week, in setting before them what Honours they owe to the King of *England*, what are the Blessings of their native Home, what are their Duties in a foreign Land, what Dangers they are exposed to among the Heathen *Chinese*, and how they may best avoid them ; what are the Enjoyments they expect at their Return, and the best Methods of Preparation for it. This Man accepts the Office, and by a solemn Vow of Allegiance to the King, and Faithfulness to his Countrymen in this Trust, he enters upon his Office.

Besides this, once in a Month, suppose they meet together, according to an Appointment of their Prince, to eat a Morfel of Bread, and drink a Glafs of Wine together, in Memory of some great Benefit which the whole Nation of *England* received by a difficult and bloody Enterprize of the King's Son, when, in former Years, he took a Voyage from *England* to *China*; and they keep up this Feast in Honour to his Name, wherein the Provisions, after a short Speech, are distributed to every Member of the Society, by the Person whom they have appointed to instruct them in *English* Affairs.

Now because this Man spends a great Part of his Time in Letters or Dispatches to *England*, and in the Study of *English* Affairs, that he may the better entertain the Assembly of his Brethren at their solemn weekly Meetings, the Community agree to release him from the secular Business of Life, and join their Liberality to maintain him with Honour.

But here let it be observed, that though they pay so much Respect to the Person whom they chuse to be their Instructor, and to go before them in the Honours due to their King, yet they do not intrust him to invent any new Ceremony to testify their Allegiance, nor to impose on them any new Law or Custom, but what he can find prescribed among the Laws of their Nation, and Appointments



pointments of the King, or of his Embassadors to *China*. in these Matters indeed, he may require Obedience in the Name of their King ; but in all other Things he must act according to the Agreement or Opinion of the Society ; which must be testified by the Vote of the major Part.

Among this Community, some happen to be aged, or sick, or disabled for Work ; or they are fallen into Poverty, and their Circumstances are sunk in the World, notwithstanding their Diligence and Labor : These are not capable of maintaining themselves ; the Society therefore chearfully contribute toward their Support : And they entrust two or three Persons with this Money, and desire them to take Care that the Table of the Poor be supplied. They entrust also with these Persons what Money they collect for the honourable Maintenance of their Teacher ; and desire them to take Care, that every Thing necessary toward their weekly Meetings at a certain Time, and at a convenient Place, be provided at their publick Charge. They go on in this Manner with much Comfort and mutual Assistance, in every Thing that relates to their Welfare in a foreign Land ; and rejoice in their Hope to meet one Day in *England*.

And as they are ever adding to their Society by admitting new Members, upon their credible Profession and Appearance to be true

*Britons*, in the Room of such as are yearly called Home; so if any among them prove to be false and insincere, and are guilty of Crimes highly disgraceful to their Profession of being Natives of *England*, and their Allegiance to their King, they have no other Punishment for them besides that they are cut off from the Society, and forbid to enjoy the Privileges thereof any longer.

Now it is so very easy to apply these Transactions of *Englishmen* in *China* to the Affairs of a *Christian Church*, that I hardly need display the Parallel. *Christians* profess to be Natives of Heaven, to be born from above: They sojourn for a Season in the World as in a foreign Land, till their Father and King summons them Home. They speak the Language of the Gospel, or of the Kingdom of Heaven, and understand it; and they know each other hereby; They agree to meet together to worship their King, and pay Allegiance to him; to learn more of his Will, and seek his Favour. The Day of their solemn Assemblies is the Day of the Resurrection of *Christ*, the Son of God, and their Lord. When they do special Honours to him, they eat Bread and drink Wine, to solemnize the Memory of their Deliverance from Sin and Hell, when he was sent into the World to die for them. Then, by calling away their Hearts from this World, and conversing about heavenly Things,


Things, they are continually preparing for their Return Home. They choose one or more *Teachers*, Pastors, or Bishops, to instruct them in their Duty, and to offer up their common Addresses to God, in the Name of *Christ*; to put them in Mind of the Things of Heaven, and to walk before them in exemplary Holiness. They choose *Deacons* to relieve the Poor, out of their publick Liberality, as well as to take Care that their Pastors or Teachers be maintained. They receive in new Members who are worthy, upon their Profession; and they cast out those that are dishonourable. They walk onward in this Way toward the heavenly State; and wait the Summons from on high, to call them thither by Death and the Resurrection,





## S E C T. VII.

### *The several Advantages of such a Church, or Christian Society.*

- I.  O natural a Scheme of social Religion as this, does not need long and express Forms of Institution, after the great Doctrines and Duties of the Christian Faith and Life are plainly revealed and received. All that is found in the New Testament relating to *Christian Churches*, so happily corresponds with these Dictates of the Light of Nature, and the Affairs of the Civil Life, that it has made these Rules much more plain, and easy, and practicable, than those of the *Jewish* Religion, or perhaps of any other Religion, that pretends to divine Revelation. This Scheme is built on the eternal Reasons and Relations of Things, as well as the Word of God. The particular positive Prescriptions relating to Christian Churches are but few, while the general Duties of Christian Fellowship are such as the Light of Nature and Reason seem to dictate



dictate to all Societies whatsoever. It is the evil Mixture of the needless and fanciful Inventions of Men, together with the plain and common Dictates of Nature and Scripture, and the Impositions of these Inventions on Conscience, which hath done so much Injury to Christianity, defaced its Beauty, and tarnished its Honours.

II. This Scheme is perfectly consistent with every Form and Kind of civil Government, whether it be a Kingdom, a Senate, or a Republick. As it does not mingle itself with the Interests of this World, nor assume to itself any civil or coercive Power, so it can make no Head against the Governors of the Country; for its Power is of another Kind, and reaches but to one single Society of Christians: Nor are they combined by any Law of *Christ*, in such united Multitudes, under one common visible Head, as to make themselves dangerous to any State. Whatsoever hath been done in the World by Men professing Christianity, in a Way of Resistance to lawful Governors, or rebellious against them, hath never been done by them as *Churches of Christ*, formed upon the Model I have laid down,

III. This Form of a *Christian Church* allows to all its Members the most perfect Liberty of Men and Christians. It is inconsistent

sistent with Persecution for Conscience-sake ; for it leaves all civil Rewards and Preferments, Penalties and Punishments, to Kingdoms, and States, and the Governors of this World. It pretends to no Power over Conscience, to compel Men to Obedience ; no Prisons, no Axes, Fire, nor Sword. It gives its Ministers Power and Authority to command nothing but what is found in the Bible : All other Things must be determined by the Consent of the People, who are supposed to be led by common Prudence, by the necessary Reasons of Things, and by a Vote of the major Part of the Society. But if in any of these Things, particular Persons, after all proper Enquiries, cannot agree with the major Part, they may make their Remonstrances, and be dismissed, if they cannot continue there with tolerable Satisfaction ; or they may withdraw to another Congregation, if they are aggrieved, and the Society refuse to dismiss them.

I confess, those Christians who differ from the major Part of the Congregation should seriously examine themselves, whether their Disagreement doth not arise from any Pique, or Prejudice, or worldly Interest, or Humour, or obstinate Self-will ; and, in some Particulars, they should deny themselves, rather than divide themselves from a Society whose Communion they have long enjoyed : More especially, they should take Heed of  
this

this in the Country, where they have not Conveniency of holding Communion with other Christian Societies. And even where they have such Opportunities and Conveniences, Persons should not indulge a fickle Humour, nor run wandering about from Place to Place, and fluttering from one Church to another, upon every little Difference. But after all, it must be acknowledged, there may be several just and reasonable Grounds for particular Christians to separate from a Society, from which they differ in some Sentiments or Transactions, though they still continue to acknowledge them to be a true Church of *Christ*. Such a Liberty as this must be still maintained ; for Christian Churches must have all voluntary Members, and not be turned into Prisons.

If any Person sins so grossly against the plain Rules of the Gospel, or the Laws of *God* or *Christ*, as to appear to renounce the Characters of a *Christian*, the Church hath Power only to renounce such a Person, and disclaim all Christian Fellowship with him, and to turn him into the World, which is the Kingdom of *Satan*, till he repent : But they have no Authority to hurt his Life or Limbs ; to touch a Hair of his Head, nor a Penny of his Money, by Way of Punishment.

IV. By such Sort of Churches as these Christianity is more easily maintained in single and-secrēt Assemblies, if the Powers of this World favour them not ; for there is no Need of large Multitudes assembling together for any Ordinances of Worship, or for Discipline ; no Need of any such publick Appearances or Transactions, as may give any unnecessary Umbrage or Suspicion to persecuting Enemies : There is no Need of Councils and Synods of Ministers of distant Cities, to meet together to make Laws for the Church, or to rectify Disorders there : Nor is there any Need to travel over large Counties or Diocesses, to fetch a rightful Ordination of a Minister for any Church ; much less to take a Journey to *Rome*, if all the Ministers in a Nation were dead, or departed from the Faith. If the whole Society, which was wont to meet together, cannot do it under a persecuting Prince, for fear of exposing themselves to publick Injury, they may assemble in smaller Parties, and their Preachers may teach, and pray, and administer all Ordinances among them, as it was often done in the primitive Times, maintaining their Christian Fellowship by secrēt Meetings : And they may all be called little Churches, *in the House*. By such single Congregations, larger or smaller, was the whole Church of *Christ* in the World continued and increased, the first two or three hundred Years,



Years, whensoever the Powers of this World took it into their Heads to persecute and destroy the Professors of the Christian Faith.

Perhaps it may be objected here, Would it not be a much more substantial and powerful Way of maintaining Christian Churches, if these single Congregations, by Vertue of their Ministers or Elders, were combined together in some sacred Bond of Union, that might make a considerable Body of People under such Heads or Leaders, or under one supreme Head, who might better defend them against the Invasion of their Rites by any secular Powers or persecuting Princes?

To this *I answer*, that Churches of *Christ* considered as such, have no secular Power in themselves, nor authority to make any Efforts against secular Powers: But when Men become *Christians*, or Members of Churches, they do not divest themselves of any secular or civil Rights or Powers which they had before: And therefore when natural or civil Liberties are unjustly and cruelly invaded by any of the Men of this World, they by the Laws of Nature have a just Right, as Men, to defend themselves; and no ecclesiastical Combinations can give them any further Right or Power than what they have as Men: And this belongs to them still, whatsoever Religion they profess, whether *natural* or *revealed*, whether *Pagan*, *Mahometan*, or *Christian*. A Professor of every Religion

ligion has a Right to be protected by the Government as long as he maintains his Allegiance to the Governors, and does no Injury to the State. But if Governors will not protect him, but will give him up to the Fury of Persecutors, he has certainly a civil Right to defend himself and his Friends against all Assaults and Injuries.

V. Miscarriages in the Government, or Conduct of such a Church as I have described, are less dangerous to Christianity; because they affect but one single Congregation, they reach but to one Society. Those ecclesiastical Governments which include vast Numbers and Multitudes combined under one or more spiritual Heads or Rulers, if there be any Misrule and Confusion brought in among them, it involves Multitudes in the Mischief of it, and sometimes shakes or destroys whole Nations. But if a Government which is included within one single Congregation be never so much divided by Contentions, and fall into the greatest Confusions, the Mischief is not of so large an Extent, nor can it have so fatal and dreadful Consequences. If the Congregation itself should be actually dissolved by these Constitutions, the particular Members of it may depart and join themselves to other Congregations within their Reach or Neighbourhood, who are nearest of their own Opinion,

nion, and walk with them in a religious and peaceful Fellowship, which they could not well do before, because of such different Opinions and divided Spirits.


VI. Such single Societies or Churches so constituted are most happily suited to maintain and carry on the great Purposes and Designs of the Gospel, for the Conversion of Sinners, and the Edification of true Christians. Of this Matter see the learned Dr. *Owen's Enquiry into the Original of Churches.* Chap. VI. Pag. 119. See also *Sermons at Berry-street*, Sermon. 49.

Upon the Whole, whensoever it shall appear that any other Form of a *Christian Church* is more happily suited to the Edification and Peace of Christians, to the Preservation of Christian Liberty, and to secure the spiritual Honours which belong to *Christ* in his Churches, and at the same Time appears to have more Countenance from the New Testament than this, I shall be glad to relinquish this Set of Sentiments, and with Pleasure exchange it for a better. That is certainly the best Form of a *Christian Church*, whereby Truth, Peace and Holiness may be most happily promoted and secured.



## S E C T. VIII.

*Of the Power of Churches to appoint  
holy Things or Actions.*

Quest.  *HETHER a Christian Church may not appoint or determine Circumstances and Ceremonies of Worship and Order, which are left undetermined in the New Testament, and require them to be observed?*

*Ans.* In the Primitive Churches there were extraordinary Gifts and Powers communicated to them: There were Apostles, Evangelists and inspired Leaders and Guides; but since these extraordinary Gifts and Powers are ceased, Reason and Scripture are our only Rules. It is upon this Foot every Christian Church, or every single Society of Christians, receiving one another in the Lord, as St. Paul speaks, that is, agreeing to worship and walk together according to the Faith and Order of the Gospel, when it is furnished with its proper Officers, *i. e.* a Bishop, or Bishops and Deacons, is the highest



SECT. VIII. *Have Churches Power, &c.* 99

highest ecclesiastical Power that I know of in this World, which has plain Evidence and Support in the Word of God, or the necessary Reason of Things. Yet I cannot find that either the Light of Reason or Scripture has given such a Church, or its Officers, any Authority to invent and use, to appoint and command new Ceremonies of divine Worship in any Case: Nor has it a Right to impose on the Consciences of Men any such self-invented Modes or Circumstances of Worship, so as to make them *holy Things*, or to oblige any single Christian to comply therewith.

But to speak a little more particularly to this Matter. We must distinguish between the *religious Ceremonies of Worship*, and the meer *natural Circumstances* of the Performance of it.

*Natural Circumstances* are such as are necessary, or at least highly expedient, for the Performance of Acts of Worship, considered meerly as natural Actions, and abstracted from their religious Design. Such are *Time*, *Place*, *Habit*, *Gesture*, &c. for no natural Action can be put forth but it must be in some Time, in some Place, in some Posture of Body; nor can any Transaction in a publick Society be conveniently performed without some sort of Garments, without a commodious Place and seasonable Hours for assembling: These in their own Nature are

properly no *Parts* of Worship or Religion, but *Circumstances* belonging to those Actions considered meerly as natural, and as the Actions of natural and sociable Creatures.

Among these *natural Circumstances* of Actions in social Worship, some are *necessary to be determined one certain Way*, and others *are not so*.

The *Circumstances necessary to be determined one certain Way*, are the Time and Place, the Language, and something of the Manner or Order of the religious Actions, &c.

Now where these are not determined by God himself, it is granted they must be determined by every worshipping Society for themselves; for they must agree what Hour to meet together, what Place to meet in, what Language \* shall be used in the Worship, whether they shall begin or end the Worship with the Lord's Supper, or with a Psalm or Song, who shall minister in holy Things: Whether there shall be any Responses of the Congregation to the Words of him that officiates in Prayer, or whether *Amen* shall be pronounced aloud, or whether a silent Assent be sufficient. Where God hath not determined these Things, I

\* Always excepting those primitive Times, when various Languages were used as an extraordinary Confirmation of the Gospel of *Christ*. But in ordinary Seasons of Worship the Assembly must know and agree before Hand, that it must be performed in a Language which they understand.

do not find that he hath ever given Authority to any Person to determine these for other Persons, or any Society of Men to determine them for other Societies; but they must be determined by an Agreement or Vote of every Society for itself. As in several of these Things there must be a Concurrence or Agreement to make any solemn and constant Meetings and Transactions of a *civil* Society, peaceful and useful, regular and orderly, so are the same Things needful to be agreed upon in a *Christian* Church to render the Worship of every single Society practicable and edifying, harmonious, agreeable, and decent.

And since these Things are necessary to be determined *one Way*, if some few Persons in the Society will not consent to the Agreement of the major Part of them, they must *depart* and join themselves to some other Society which is more for their Convenience. Such are the various Tempers, Engagements, Sentiments, Inclinations and Conveniences of different Persons, that there would be a great Bar put upon the frequent Meetings of any large Society for any civil or religious Purposes, if they must not meet and transact any Affairs till every single Person be perfectly pleased. If therefore the minor Part cannot, or will not consent to what the Bulk of the Society agree upon, here is no Imposition upon their

Consciences, while they are allowed to join themselves with other Societies, civil or religious, where these necessary and disputed Circumstances are agreed and practiced more according to their Mind.

The *Circumstances which are not necessary to be determined one Way*, are the Postures or Gestures of the Body, the Garments of the Preacher, or of him that prays, of Singers or Hearers, &c. and these every Person may determine for himself: Some may have a blue Garment, while others have red or brown, black or white; some may wear a long Coat, others a short one; some may stand in Prayer, others kneel if they will; some may chuse to stand in singing or Preaching, while others may chuse to sit in the same Society.

I must confess there seems to be something of a natural Decency in the Uniformity of some of these Circumstances, especially that of *Gesture*, in one and the same Congregation, in some particular Parts of Worship, as standing in Prayer, &c. but no such Necessity of such a Uniformity as to give Power to any Person or Society to determine for every single Worshipper, and oblige him to obey.

If any whole Church, or a Multitude of Churches in a Nation will chuse to agree in any particular Practice, it is well; or if they can persuade every Person to consent to the same;



same: But if some Persons will presume to determine all these Circumstances one Way, and will impose them upon their Fellow-Christians by a pretended Authority, they go beyond the Bounds that either the Light of Nature or Scripture allows, and assume such a Power over the Consciences of Men as I cannot find the Chapter and Verse where it was given them; for these Circumstances being left indifferent in themselves, in the Nature of Things, and in Scripture, they are not *necessary to be determined one Way* for a whole Society, and much less should all this Society be obliged in Conscience to comply with such an Imposition.

Having given such an Account of the *natural Circumstances* of social Worship, let us enquire what are *religious Ceremonies*.

*Religious Ceremonies* are either *real Actions*, or *Modes and Circumstances of Action* by which some special Honour is designed to be paid to God, and therefore God alone can institute them, who alone can determine what shall be honourable to himself. These have generally a Signification of something inward and invisible annexed to them: But whether we can learn what they signify or no, still there is a *Holiness* and a *Necessity* placed in them by the divine Appointment; and therefore Man cannot appoint them, nor add to them, because he cannot put *Holiness* into any Thing, nor make any Thing

an Authority to impose Things which ought to be left indifferent.

Surely the fourteenth Chapter to the *Romans* lays a Foundation for this Christian Liberty, and forbids to impose on Conscience the Observation of Meats or Days, and in general all Impositions of this Kind. The Apostle, while he handles this Subject, had no Order to impose or forbid these Practices on the *Romans*, to whom he wrote. He leaves every Man to use his own Liberty in the Gospel, *nor be intangled with any fresh Yokes of Bondage*; supposing always that the Light of Nature and common Reason will keep all sober Christians within the Bounds of human Decency, common Prudence and Civility; and that a Preference be given to such Modes, and Gestures, and Seasons, which seem to be patronized by the Examples mentioned in Scripture.

The Custom also of the holiest and purest Churches may have some Influence to direct our Practice, in such Affairs of small Importance where we cannot find any other Rule of Determination, either from the Light of Nature or Scripture. The Apostle *Paul* seems to give this Advice to the *Corinthians* in the Business of *wearing the hair long or short*, 1 Cor. xi. For after he had offered some Reason on one side from the meer Light of Nature and Decency, he adds, Ver. 16. *that if any Man seem to be contentious,*  
i. e.

i. e., be not satisfied with my Arguments and persist in contending about this Matter, *we have no such Customs, nor the Churches of God:*

i. e. Let him be determined by the Custom of us the Apostles, and of other Christian Churches; let him not affect a Singularity in Things of less Moment, nor give Offence to the Generality of the most serious and pious Professors of the same Faith in such little Things as these are.

But if any Man, or any Society of Men, shall assume so much to themselves, as to pretend a divine Authority to confine other Churches and Christians to a most exquisite Uniformity in every Punctilio that relates to Religion and Circumstances of Worship, even in Things which God has not appointed, they throw us back again into a sort of *Judaism*, and make and impose new Yokes of Bondage; they pretend to bind what *Christ* has made free, and seem to usurp his Prerogative: A Pretence to such Power appears to me to be the very Spring and Spirit of *Antichristianism*; there is the Foundation for *Papacy* laid, though it has not arisen yet to an universal Supremacy, to an infallible Chair, and a triple Crown. See Page 66, &c.

All Christians are bound by the New Testament to worship one God, even God the Father who dwells in Heaven, in the Name  
of

of one Mediator *Jesus Christ*, by the Aids or Operations of one Spirit, they are bound to be baptized into these Names, and to remember the Death of *Christ* in the holy Supper, to trust in the Promises of the Gospel, and to practise the Precepts of it in an uniform Life of Holiness. This is evident and certain, and perhaps this may be thought almost sufficient to maintain the Unity of the Christian Church. But still let it be observed, that where *Christians* are fallen into very different Opinions in any important Matters of Doctrine or Duty, or where their Sentiments are so extremely divided, and perhaps contrary to each other in Matters of Worship and Order, that they cannot agree and join in the same Forms and Modes of divine Service, or where they have not Charity enough to bear with each others Differences in Things of less Moment, they ought not to force themselves, nor to be forced into one Society or Church; but they should join themselves to such distinct Societies as are nearest of their own Mind; for their Edification in Faith, Holiness and Love, is one great or chief End of Church Fellowship.

Though the Men of *Israel* were bound by the Law to join three Times a Year to worship God who dwelt in the *Temple* or *Tavernacle* by the appointed Sacrifices of the *Pas-sover*, *Pentecost*, &c. yet they were not bound by any Law of God to attend that *Syna-*  
gogue



*gogue* which was nearest to their own Dwelling, where Prayer and Praise was performed, and Instructions and Exhortations given to the People. Herein they had, or they should have had, Liberty to chuse their Fellow-Worshippers and the Synagogue where they would worship, if they had any Scruple upon their Consciences about the Practices of that which was nearest to them. And the same Liberty belongs to Christians in every Age and Nation.

To force all Christians into the same Church, whose Understandings and Opinions point different Ways, and to bind them together in an outward Form of Fellowship with their Minds so much divided, is the Way to increase their Differences, to kindle their Fire with more Fierceness, and awaken their Wrath to a higher Degree, till they grow mad against each other and ruin the Church. It is like tying *Samson's* Foxes together by the Tail with Firebrands between them, while their Heads stand contrary ways, and then inclosing them all with a strong Fence in one Field: There they will unavoidably snarl and rage against one another; they will draw different Ways, and diffuse their Fire and Wrath till they have burnt up the Field, and destroyed a lovely Harvest.



THE  
T E R M S  
OF  
CHRISTIAN COMMUNION,

Humbly proposed to the  
CHURCHES OF CHRIST,  
WITH  
An Attempt towards the SOLUTION of various Questions and Cases of Conscience, arising from this Subject

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QUESTION I.

*What is Christian Communion? And what are the general and agreed Terms of it?*



CHRISTIAN Communion in the Sense of Scripture, is that Communion or Fellowship which Christians have with God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, or with one another; and both are joined together by the Apostle *John*, *Eph.* i. 3.

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i. 3. *That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have Fellowship, or Communion, with us; and truly our Fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.*

This *Communion* or *Fellowship* in the spiritual and *invisible* Part of it consists in a Participation of the Favour of God, the spiritual Benefits of *Christ*, and the invisible and everlasting Blessings of the Gospel. But this is not our present Subject of Discourse.

The *visible Fellowship* or *Communion* that Christians have with each other, consists chiefly in the *Participation of the spiritual Ordinances of the Gospel, and mutual Assistances for the Good of each other.*

The special Ordinances of the Gospel are chiefly these two, Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

*Baptism* is an Ordinance appointed by *Christ*, for our Entrance into the visible Church; and when once performed is never to be repeated.

The *Lord's Supper* is an Ordinance appointed by *Christ* after we are entered into the Church, for the Assistance and Increase of our Faith and Hope, our Comfort and Holiness; and ought to be as often repeated as Christians have proper Opportunity: It represents our Communion with the Lord *Jesus Christ* in his Death, and the Benefits which are derived from it, such as the Pardon

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don of Sin through his Sacrifice of Atonement, &c. and it represents also our Communion with one another in those Benefits, or our joint Participation thereof, according to the Apostle's Description of it, 1 Cor. x. 16, 17. *The Cup of Blessing which we bless, is it not the Communion of the Blood of Christ? We are all Partakers of that one Bread.*

The other Parts, Privileges, or Offices of Christian Communion, shall be mentioned, when there is Need of it, in distinguishing *constant* and *occasional* Communion.

Now among all the Ordinances of Worship it is in our partaking of these two, (*viz.*) Baptism and the Lord's Supper, that *special Christian Communion* chiefly consists. But when we use the Words *Christian Communion*, we have most frequently a Regard to the *Lord's Supper*, because our Communion with one another, and joint Participation of the Blessings of the Gospel, is most plainly represented thereby; and by the frequent Repetition of it, our *Christian Communion* or holy Fellowship is maintained in a more explicit and honourable Manner.

Having considered briefly the *Nature of Christian Communion*, we must enquire now into the *general Terms of it*.

As in order to hold an inward and spiritual Communion with *Christ* and his People, we must be sincere Believers, or real Christians; so every Person seeking visible Communion  
with



Qu. I. *And the general Terms of it?* 113

with the Church of *Christ* should satisfy his own Conscience with nothing short of real Christianity: But Christians and Churches not being able to search the Heart as *Christ* and Conscience can, the *Term* of our visible Communion with Christians is a *credible Profession of real Christianity*, or a *professed Subjection to the Gospel of Christ*, as the Apostle expresses it, 2 Cor. ix. 13. that is, such an outward Profession of inward and hearty Christianity, as gives just and credible Evidence that this Profession is sincere, and that the Person thus professing is a hearty Christian: Rom. x. 9, 10. *If thou shalt confess with thy Mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine Heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the Heart Man believeth unto Righteousness, and with the Mouth Confession is made unto Salvation.* If a Man profess Christianity in any Manner or Form of Profession soever, and yet make it plainly and openly appear by other Parts of his Conduct, that his Profession is not sincere and hearty, he has no Right to Salvation according to this Text, and has always been deemed unworthy of Christian Communion in all the Scripture History, and in the best and purest Ages of the Church. Those that *profess they know God, but in Works deny him* are to be counted *abominable* amongst all Christians. Tit. i. 17.

It is not therefore *real and inward Christianity in the Heart* that can give any Man a Right to Communion in outward Ordinances, unless it be professed in a credible Manner to the World; nor can *the Want of such real and inward Religion* exclude any Person from Communion while he makes such a credible Profession, for God only is the Judge of Hearts and not Man, we must act according to outward Appearances: There will be Hypocrites in the Church of *Christ* in this World, and there is no Help for it: *The Wheat and Tares will grow together in the same Field till the Time of Harvest.* The Day of Judgement is the only Time to decide the Matter completely, and distinguish Hypocrites for ever from real Christians; and therefore all that have the credible Form and Appearance of Christianity must be admitted into the Church of *Christ* on Earth.

This is the common Sentiment and Practice of all the reformed Churches, that a *credible Profession is the general Term of Communion*, though they differ about some particular Circumstances of this Profession that go to make up the Credibility of it. These Things are so generally acknowledged by the most and best of the Writers of our Day, that I shall not stay here to prove them, and my Business in this Discourse is with those Christians that allow and acknowledge what I have already said.

Now

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Now a *credible Profession of Christianity* implies these two Things. *First*, that the Matter professed be of such a *Nature*, and declared in such a *Manner*, as may render the Profession credible; and *Secondly*, there must also be some Person or Persons to whom that Profession must appear credible, and who must be Judges of the Credibility of it.

I shall begin with the last of these and dispatch it soon, because I mention it only as a needful Introduction to the chief Questions relating to the *particular Terms of Christian Communion*.





## QUESTION II.

*Who are the proper Judges of the  
Credibility of our Profession.*

### SECTION I.



*J*ESUS *Christ* in his Word is the supreme Judge of what is *Truth*, and what is *Duty*; what Sort of Persons ought to be admitted to Christian Communion, and who should be forbid. But as he is absent from us, and speaks not but by his Word, and his Word does not apply its own Rules to particular Persons, *John, Thomas, William, &c.* In every Age and Nation, there is a Necessity that some Persons must judge and determine whether *John, Thomas, William, &c.* have these Characters of worthy Communicants, which *Christ* hath appointed in his Word.

Every Man for himself must use his own best Judgment in searching his Heart, and trying himself by the Word of God, whether he has complied with the Terms of *Salvation*,



tion, and he must judge for himself too whether it be his Duty to propose himself to *Christian Communion*: But no Man must determine for himself whether he shall be received to Communion with others, and partake of their Sacreds. No Man can impose himself upon a Church, meerly because he thinks himself qualified: This would lay all the Garden of *Christ* wast again, throw down all the Fences, and reduce it to a meer WilderNESS: This Supposition is too wild to be admitted.

If therefore a *credible Profession of Christianity* be the Term of Communion appointed by *Christ* in his Word, there must be some present and living Judges of the *Credibility* of this Profession; and I know not who can be so proper to judge as those Persons with whom Communion is desired. This is not a Matter transacted meerly between a Minister and a single Christian, for the Lord's Supper is not to be administered but in a Community; as 1 *Cor.* xi. 20, 21, 33. *The Church must come together to one Place, and they must tarry for one another.* There must be therefore the Consent of the Community or Society, to admit a Person to share in and partake of the sacred Things in Communion with them. This Ordinance of *Christ* represents the Communion of his *Members* in *one Body*, by the *one Bread* and *one Cup*, 1 *Cor.* x. 16, 17. And the Duties of

Church-Fellowship, to which we then engage ourselves, are mutual Duties between a Community or Society of Christians, therefore there must be a Consent on both Sides; and as a Person must judge concerning the Society, whether he will join himself to them, so the Society must judge concerning him, whether they think him fit to be received as one of them.

It is into Union with that Society that the Person proposing himself is to be admitted, either in a *constant* or *occasional* Way; and they give him the Leave and Privilege of becoming a Partner with them, or a Member of their Body; and surely the Light of Nature tells us, that every *voluntary Society* must judge who shall be Members of their Society, and enjoy Fellowship with them in their peculiar Privileges.

It must be confessed indeed, that where this voluntary Society professes a Subjection to the Will and Law of any sovereign or superior Power, and this Sovereign has given them a Rule whereby they are bound to admit Persons into their Society, in this Case, their own meer arbitrary Will and Pleasure cannot violate or neglect this Rule without Guilt; nor can they appoint any new Rules, and make them necessary Terms and Conditions of such Admission: And this is the Case of all Christian Churches. For though they are so many voluntary Societies, yet *Christ*  
their

their common Lord and Sovereign has appointed the general Rule of admitting Members into his Churches, (*viz.*) that *all such shall be admitted who make a credible Profession of Christianity.*

But wheresoever there is such a superior acknowledged Rule given to direct in this Affair, still the Society itself must judge concerning the true Sense and just Application of this Rule to particular Cases. It is this Society that will suffer Reproach, and bear the Trouble of it, if a Person admitted, prove scandalous and unworthy; and it is but reasonable therefore that they should determine whether he be a Person fit and worthy to come among them or no; but still according to the Rules of *Christ*, so far as they can understand his Meaning. And as this is the Voice and Language of common Reason, so it is also the Appointment of *Christ* in his Word, and this was the Practice of the primitive Times, as I shall shew hereafter.

The Society ought surely to have the same Liberty which the proposed Person has, and if he has Liberty to judge whether he should seek Communion with them, they ought to have Liberty to judge whether they should receive him. Each has a Right to judge of the Sense and Application of the Rules of Scripture to direct their own Actions.



Now since there can be no regular or proper Christian Communion held and maintained but in and with a *Church of Christ*, we must enquire into the Nature of the *Christian Church* to find out which are the Persons in, or of this Church, that must judge and declare others fit for Communion with it.

SECT. II. The *Church of Christ* is either visible or invisible. The *invisible Church* includes all the real Saints that are in Heaven or on Earth. But our Question has not to do with the *Church* in this Sense.

The *whole visible Church of Christ upon Earth*, consists of all those Persons in the World that make a visible and credible Profession of the Christian Religion, however scattered through all Nations, and whether joined together by mutual Agreement in particular Societies, or not. The New Testament sometimes useth the Word *Church* in this Sense, *Matt. xvi. 18. 1 Cor. xii. 28.* and other Places; and it is in this Sense when a Person is *baptized*, he is said to be received into the Christian Church, for hereby he becomes a Member of the Catholick Church visible on Earth.

But all this vast scattered Multitude can never maintain and perform Acts of Christian Communion together in the Lord's Supper, which is the other chief Ordinance of special



cial Communion: Nor indeed can they keep up the publick Honour of God, a publick Profession of the Name of *Christ*, nor the Duties of publick Worship, without their being divided into particular Societies, which agree at stated Times and Seasons to *come together to one Place*, as the Apostle expresses it, for Purposes of Christian Worship, 1 Cor. xi. 18. and xiv. 23.

Such a *Society or Congregation of Persons, both Men and Women, making a credible Profession of Christianity, and united by mutual Agreement or Consent to meet together usually at the same Time and Place for the Performance of Christian Worship*, is a Church of Christ; and this is the clearest and plainest Notion that I can frame of a particular *Church of Christ*, according to the Language of the holy Scripture. Consult the Book of *Acts*, consult the sacred *Epistles*, where the Word *Church* is used at least forty or fifty Times in this Sense.

I will not deny but the Word *Church* (even where it does not signify the *Catholick Church*, visible or invisible) may in some few Places be used for a larger Number of Christians than could meet in one Place, as the *Church of Jerusalem* in the very beginning of Christianity, while Christians multiplied faster than they could well be formed into regular distinct Societies; yet even in some of those Places perhaps it includes no  
more

more than did meet together for some special Purpose. See *Acts* xi. 22. and xv. 22.

The Word *Church* may also in a few other Places be used for a smaller Collection of Christians, that might occasionally meet, or perhaps dwell together, as the *Church in the House of Aquila and Priscilla*, 1 Cor. xvi. 19. and in the House of *Philemon*, *Phil.* v. 2.

But the most common Acceptation of the Word *Church* (where it signifies a visible Company of Christians) implies such a Number, as met usually by common Consent in one Place for Christian Communion, in stated and solemn Ordinances of Worship, and especially the Lord's Supper, as in the forecited Texts of the Epistle to the *Corinthians*, and many others.

This is the *Church* that is described in the 19th Article of the *Church of England* (viz.)  
 “ A Congregation of faithful Men in which  
 “ the pure Word of God is preached, and  
 “ the Sacraments be duly ministered, according to *Christ's* Ordinance, in all those  
 “ Things that of Necessity are requisite to  
 “ the same”.

Yet let it be noted here, that such a Society as this may be properly called a *Church*, when their Preachers, Ministers, or all their Officers are dead, or even before they have any Minister, or any Officers fixed amongst them; and without doubt they have Power  
 to

to receive any Person that desires it, and makes credible Profession of Christianity, into their Society, having judged his Profession credible, and declared him in their Judgment fit for Christian Communion. But it would lead me too far from my present Design to insist upon particular Proof of these Things, which has been often done, and which is now the pretty general Opinion of Men that are not attached to any particular Party, but give themselves Leave to think freely, and follow the Dictates of Reason and Revelation.

SECT. III. The *Ordinances* of the Gospel must be *administered* in a Church with Decency, and Honour, and spiritual Advantage: But the whole Body of the Church cannot thus administer them; therefore it is necessary that these Concerns be committed to such Persons as are peculiarly fitted for those Administrations by Knowledge and Prudence, and all proper Talents; and the Church ought to be furnished with such Officers who should be chosen and solemnly set apart, devoted and ordained to this Work. The particular Forms of their *Choice* and *Ordination* do not enter into the present Argument.

The Business of *receiving Members* into the Communion of the Church, and the *forbidding or excluding* of them is a Matter  
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of as serious Importance as the Administration of other Christian Ordinances; and oftentimes it is attended with great Difficulty. A whole Assembly of Men cannot be supposed to manage this Affair altogether with Decency and Regularity, and without Confusion: Therefore it is abundantly convenient (if not necessary) to commit the first and special Care of these Matters also to particular Persons of human and divine Knowledge superior to the rest; Persons of great Skill in the Things of God, in serious Religion, and in the Affairs and Tempers of Men, qualified with due Zeal for the Honour and Purity of the Ordinances and Churches of *Christ*, and filled with great Tenderneſs and Compassion to the Souls of Men; Persons of good Judgment and Discretion, of great Meekneſs, Condeſcenſion and Charity, that if poſſible they may not give Occaſion to the Church to exclude any of the Sheep of *Chriſt* from the viſible Fold, nor admit unclean Animals into the Flock.

The chief Officers of a particular Church, whether they be called *Biſhops, Miniſters, Preſbyters*, or *Elders, Paſtors, Guides, Leaders, Governors* or *Rulers*, &c. are the proper Persons to have the firſt Overſight and chief Care of this Matter; and in our Churches it is committed chiefly to them, to take Account of the Profeſſion of Chriſtianity made by Persons deſiring Communion,  
to



to give some general Notices of it to the Church, or a more particular Narrative where it is desired; and to receive them to Communion either with the explicit and formal Vote of all the Congregation, or only by their implicit and silent Consent.

But if it happen that there is but one Minister or Presbyter in that Church, or if the Ministers are young Men of small Experience in the World, it is usual and proper that some of the eldest, gravest and wisest Members be deputed by the Church to join with and assist the Ministers in the Care and Management of this Affair.

Those Persons who have been chosen by the Church, and have been solemnly devoted by the Church, and have also solemnly devoted themselves to that *Office* or Service, have been usually called *ruling Elders*. And such Officers have been supposed to be described in those Words of St. Paul to Timothy, 1 Tim. i. 17. *Let the Elders that rule well be counted worthy of double Honour, i. e. Respect and Maintenance: But especially if they are also Preachers as well as Rulers, if they labour in the Word and Doctrine.* These are supposed to be called *Governments*, 1 Cor. xii. 28. and Rom. xii. 8. *He that ruleth.* But if such Persons are but appointed to assist a Minister, especially one who is young and unexperienced in the Government of the Church, I will never quarrel with any Man, whether

whether he will call it a *divine Order*, or merely *prudential*, since the Scripture has not determined this Matter with uncontested Evidence.

These Ministers, Officers and Persons so deputed by the Church, are therefore the *first* proper Judges of the Credibility of any Person professing the Christian Faith, and desiring Communion with that Church; for these are supposed to be qualified above others with Christian Knowledge and Wisdom, and they are also appointed by the Church to the Care and Conduct thereof.

Yet in this Case they are not so *absolute* and *supreme*, but that the Congregation must some Way or other approve of their Judgement, either by an explicit Vote, or at least by a silent Consent, before the proposed Communicant is received to the Communion of the Church; for it is still the Consent of the Church that must make him a Member of it. Or the Congregation may for just Reasons disallow of their Judgement in particular Cases; and if they proceed obstinately to mismanage their Affairs of this kind, and especially in notorious Instances, and make the *Terms of Admission* larger or narrower than *Christ* has appointed, or if they notoriously misapply the right Rules of Admission or Exclusion to wrong Persons, that Church or Society may reverse their Sentence, and act according to their own Judgement,

ment, and if it be needful may also call them to an Account for it, and assume the Judgement, Exclusion and Admission of Communicants intirely and immediately into their own Hands; till they shall chuse other Officers who shall preside in this Affair, and exercise this Power more agreeably to those sacred Rules and Terms of Communion which that Society believes to be the Will of *Christ* in his Word.

SECT. IV. This Conduct of Affairs seems to be founded on the very Nature of religious Societies, and the common Light of Reason; and it seems also to be much countenanced by a Variety of Scriptures in the New Testament, where the Directions of the Apostle concerning the receiving and excluding of Members are addressed to the Churches of *Christ*, at *Rome*, at *Corinth*, at *Thessalonica*, &c. I might multiply Quotations to this Purpose, Rom. xv. 7. *Receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the Glory of God.* Rom. xvi. 1, 2. *I commend unto you Phebe our Sister, ----- That ye receive her in the Lord as becometh Saints,* 1 Cor. v. 4, *In the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ when ye are gathered together, and my Spirit with the Power of our Lord Jesus Christ to deliver such a one unto Satan, &c.* Ver. 7. *Purge ye out therefore the old Leaven.* Ver. 13. *Put away from among yourselves*



*selves that wicked Person. 2 Thes. iii. 6. Now we command you, Brethren, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every Brother that walketh disorderly.*

Though the Apostle *Paul* gives Directions to *Timothy* and *Titus* about the Rejection of Hereticks, yet it must be noted that these two were extraordinary Persons, Evangelists divinely commissioned and endowed, and by Vertue hereof might act in a superior Way in every Church whither they were sent; and they were to teach the Churches the Orders of *Christ*: Nor does it follow that every ordinary Minister has the same Power; nor indeed does it appear that *Timothy* and *Titus* were to exercise it without the Churches Consent. For St. *Paul* himself when he gave Apostolical Orders for excommunicating the incestuous *Corinthian*, would have it done when the whole Church was gathered together, and as an Act of that particular Community; as in the Texts before cited.

Though the seven Epistles in the second and third Chapters of the *Revelations* are inscribed to the Angels or Ministers of those seven Churches, and Directions are there given about the casting out false Worshipers and Idolaters, yet it is evident that the Contents of these Epistles are plainly addressed to the whole Body of Christians that  
made



made up those several Societies or Churches, and they were to cast out Idolaters, &c. from among them, as an Act of the Churches by their Ministers.

Though Ministers and Elders are sometimes called *Guides* and *Rulers*, &c. yet it is never to be understood in so absolute a Sense, as to take all Power away from the Society or Congregation, and leave the Ministers to tyrannize as they please over the Churches, and, like *Diotrephes*, to admit and exclude whom they will; for which *Usurpation* the Apostle *John* severely censures him. *3 Epist. Ver. 9, 10.*

Now when such a Mode of Admission into Churches as I have described, *by the Ministration of the Elders, and the Consent of the Church*, has the Light of Nature and Reason leading us into it, and the Scripture gives frequent Countenance to it by various Rules and Examples, it does not fall very short of a sacred Institution.

SECT. V. But it will be *objected* here, *That it may happen that the Ministers may be in the Right, and the People in the Wrong, in their Judgement in particular Cases: And must the Vote of the People decide such an Affair, against the Opinion of Ministers, Elders, or Rulers?*

I answer, in the *First* Place, That when any Person is proposed to the Church, concerning whose Admission the Minister and People are not agreed, it is much better to persuade that Person to seek Communion with

some other Church, rather than occasion Strife and Debate betwixt the People and the Minister. But if that cannot be conveniently, surely it is more adviseable in itself, and more acceptable to God, that any single Person should deny himself the Benefit of special Ordinances, at least for a Season, than become a *Bone of Contention*, and perhaps a *Sword of Division*, in a Christian Church. A Person of a true Christian Temper would not willingly admit a new Member, nor be admitted, to the real Offence and Grief of any Persons that were there before.

I say, in the *next* Place, That if this Method of Peace cannot obtain, but Admission of the Person is still pressed and pursued, it is the Duty of the Minister to endeavour, by all proper Arguments, to convince and persuade the People, and lead them to practise what he esteems the Mind of *Christ* in this Case, and with much *Gentleness to instruct them that oppose themselves*. If this will not do, then he should lay the Laws of *Christ* before the People, with great and awful Solemnity, and acquaint them with the Terms of Communion which *Christ* has appointed, according to his own best Understanding of the Gospel: He may charge them, in the Name of *Christ*, to receive or exclude such Persons only whom *Christ* appoints to be received or excluded; and that as they will answer it at the Bar of *Christ*. But if the People persist

persist in their own Judgement still, in Opposition to the Minister, they must be left to answer it to *Christ* their Judge; for *Christ* has left no infallible Vicegerent here on Earth, to govern his Churches contrary to their own Sense and Interpretation of his written Word.

It may be proper on such an Occasion, that some friendly Methods of private Conference should be tried, and the reconciling Assistance of other prudent Ministers and Christians desired. But if these Attempts prove vain and ineffectual, and the Difference still remains, there is no Power on Earth (that I know) which can authoritatively determine any Minister to give the sacred Ordinances of *Christ* contrary to his Conscience; nor can any Power on Earth command and constrain a Christian Church to receive a Person to their Communion, whom they in their Consciences judge unworthy of it; therefore, rather than dwell together in endless Contentions, the Minister must peacefully resign his Office in that Church.

And the same Rule must be followed in many other Cases, wherein a Minister and People resolve to disagree, besides in this Point of Admission to their Communion, or Exclusion from it. For it is better that the Minister should leave himself to the Providence of God for further Service, than that a Church of *Christ* should be rent in Pieces by a Minister's resolved Continuance amongst  

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them, and making Parties and Wars in so sacred a Society. There is nothing perfect in human Affairs on Earth, where Knowledge and Grace are so imperfect. We must not expect compleat Purity and Peace, till we arrive at the blessed Communion of the Church in Heaven: Yet I may venture to affirm, that Things would scarce ever arise to this extreme Height of Difference, if Christian Charity and Love, Humility and mutual Condescension, were but more universally taught and practised, and the furious and narrow Spirits of Men tempered and enlarged, according to the glorious Pattern of the Apostles of *Christ*.

SECT. VI. Here will occur another *Enquiry* also; and that is, *When the Congregation itself is divided in their Sentiments, how must any proposed Question be determined? Or whether a proposed Communicant must be admitted?*

*I answer*; In all such Cases, the Light of Nature and the common Usage of Mankind have determined it, that the *greater Number* should carry the Question according to their Sentiments, and the *lesser* ought to submit.

But I would take the Liberty to give my Opinion in Point of Prudence thus: That though, in Questions of less Moment, it is proper enough that the *major Vote* should decide the Case, yet, in an Affair of considerable Importance, such as the Choice of a Minister,



Minister, or the receiving a Member to constant Communion, &c. if it were possible, I would obtain an universal Concurrence of all the Church; for it would be better (if such a Thing could be so managed, as) that no old Member of the Church be made uneasy by receiving a new one; much less should a Church, that will act with Prudence, admit a new Member contrary to the Sentiments of their Minister, or give Occasion of Grief to him, as I have before hinted. But surely, I would never determine the Affair only by a Majority of one or two Voices; for this will be in Danger of giving so great an Uneasiness to a considerable Number of the Church, (tho' they happen to be the *minor* Part,) that oftentimes it will administer Occasion for Strife, Division, and Separation.

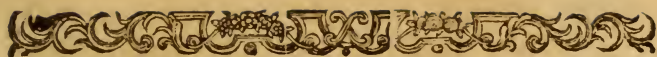
There is one Piece of Prudence that we may learn from our greatest Enemies, *the Pope, and the Conclave of Cardinals*; who, in the Election of a new Pope, never appoint the Person but by the Vote of *two Thirds* of the College of Cardinals; that in an Affair of such Importance, there may be no dangerous Contention of Parties after the Person is elected. And I should think this so valuable a Rule of Prudence in the sacred Affairs of a Church of *Christ*, that no Matter of Moment should ever be determined, unless *two Thirds* or more of the Congregation agree to it. And indeed, if there be a firm Opposition made, but by two or three considerable

Members, against the Admission of any new Communicant, I would not be hasty to admit the Person, but rather perswade him to delay, or to seek Communion elsewhere, than endanger the Peace of a whole Church.

I desire it may be noted here, that I have only delivered my private Opinion concerning the distinct Power of *Elders*, *Ministers*, and *Votes of the People*, in Admission of Members to the Communion of the Church: But whether the Power of receiving or excluding be vested entirely in the *People*, or in the *Minister*, or in *both together*; whether by a *Majority of Votes*, or *universal Consent* of a particular Church, it equally serves the Purpose of my Argument in most of the following Questions upon this Subject.

I put in this *Note* only to secure my Readers against any Prejudice or hasty Judgement against the following Parts of the Book, tho' they should happen to differ from me in the present Question.





## Q U E S T I O N   I I I .

*What are the particular Terms of Christian Communion? Or, What Things are necessary to make the Profession of Christianity credible?*

### S E C T I O N   I .



HAVING inquired who are the *Persons* that must judge of the Credibility of our Profession in order to Christian Communion, we proceed next to inquire, *What Things go to make up a credible Profession*; and we must take great Care in this Matter not to make new Terms and Conditions of our own, which *Christ* the Lord and King of his Church has not made; nor to insist upon any Thing as necessary to render a *Profession credible*, which may not be fairly deduced from the Rules and Examples recorded in the New Testament, and the Application of them to our present Age, according to the different

Circumstances of Times, Places, and Persons.

It must be granted that there are several Parts of necessary Conduct in Christian Churches and sacred Ordinances, that arise from the very Nature and Reason of Things, from the very Being of Societies, and from the Circumstances of all human Affairs ; and we must not expect that all these should be dictated by divine Revelation, and written down with all their minute Particulars in express Words of Scripture. It would be endless for the sacred Writers to have attempted it, and most unreasonable for us to expect it: For the *Light of Nature* and Reason is given us by God himself for our Direction, as well as the *Light of Revelation*; and whatsoever Rules may be drawn by plain Reasoning, and by easy and necessary Inference from the Comparison of Scripture-times with our own, may and ought to be esteemed a Part of our Direction in these Affairs, as well as the express Words of Scripture ; for Scripture itself often gives us but very short and imperfect Hints of the whole Process of civil or ecclesiastical Transactions. This shall be more fully made to appear, when I come to answer an Objection raised from primitive Practice.

After a diligent Search into the holy Scripture, and careful Observation of Christian Churches and their Affairs, *these three Things*  
appear



appear to me to be necessary, at least in our Times, to make a *Profession of Christianity* sufficiently *credible* for Christian Communion.

*First*, A Confession of all the necessary Articles of Christian Religion.

*Secondly*, A professed Subjection to all the necessary Rules of Christian Duty.

*Thirdly*, Such a blameless and holy Practice in Life, as may make the Profession of the Lips appear, in the common Judgement of Men, to be the sincere Sense of the Heart.

Note, under the first Head, I say, a *Confession of all the necessary Articles of Christian Religion*, rather than the *Christian Faith*, that I may plainly include the practical Articles of Repentance and new Obedience, &c. as well as the doctrinal ones.

Reason and Revelation, Nature and Scripture, seem to make these three Things necessary to a credible Profession of Christianity.

*For* if a Man makes never so fair an Appearance of Christian Duties in his Practice, yet if in Words he refuse to profess the Christian Faith, or deny any necessary Doctrine or Duty of it, he is not worthy of Christian Communion.

*Or* if a Man give never so good an Account of his Knowledge and Belief of all the  
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Articles of the Christian Religion, and his moral Conversation and Carriage towards Men, has been generally blameless in the Eye of the World ; yet if he utterly refuse to declare his sincere Intention to practise any of the plain and necessary Duties of the Christian Religion, he cannot be accounted worthy of Christian Communion.

Or if his Words make never so full a Confession of all the Doctrines and Duties of Christianity, and profess a sincere Belief of and Submission to them, yet if in his constant Practice he be a Liar, an Adulterer, a Drunkard, a known Cheat, or a Robber, &c. his wicked Practice makes his Profession incredible, he is not worthy of Christian Communion.

SECT. II. But I would deliver my Thoughts more fully on these three Particulars that make up the *Credibility of a Profession*, and shew what is implied in each of them.

*First, a Confession of all the necessary Articles of Christian Religion, includes in it those Articles that are necessary to Salvation, and those that are necessary to maintain and practise this Communion ; which two are certainly different from each other.*

Though it has been often said in a charitable Way, and with very good Reason in general Discourse, that *there should be nothing required*

*required in order to Christian Communion which is not necessary to Salvation, yet this cannot exclude the Knowledge of what Christian Communion is. The very Nature of the Thing requires that we should know how to practise this Communion, before we can actually practise and enjoy it. Now as the Lord's Supper itself is not of absolute Necessity to Salvation, the Things necessary to communicate in the Lord's Supper, must imply something more than meerly the Things necessary to Salvation; as I shall also make plainly appear under the Seventh Question, which will be entirely imployed on this first Part of Christian Profession; and therefore I proceed to the Second.*

SECT. III. *Secondly, a professed Subjection to all the necessary Rules of Christian Duty, includes in it not only those Duties that are necessary to Salvation, but those Duties also that are necessary to practise Christian Communion.*

The first Sort of Christian Duties are those that are necessary to Salvation, such as the Fear, Love, and Worship of God; Faith, Love and Obedience towards our Lord *Jesus Christ*; Repentance of Sin, and an humble Trust or Hope in the Promises of the Gospel, as shall be shewn at large under the Seventh Question. Now this Profession does not signify a meer Engagement or Promise  
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hereafter to fulfil these Duties, but also a Profession that we have begun to practise them already; for we are not received into a Church in order to receive *Jesus Christ* the Lord, but upon a credible Profession that we have received *Jesus Christ* already, Rom. xv. 7. *Receive ye one another as Christ has received us.* We must have therefore some Evidence and Hope that we have received *Christ* in all his necessary Offices, as our Lord and Saviour, and consequently that he has received us, before we should propose ourselves to be received by any visible Church.

Now if a Man professes *Repentance*, it implies that he has been made sensible of Sin, that he has been taught the Evil of it, that he mourns for what is past, and is daily watching against it. If a Man professes *Faith in Christ* as a Propitiation and Atonement, it implies that he is acquainted with his Guilt in the Sight of God, that he is in Danger of divine Wrath, and that he is not able to make Atonement for his own Sins, and therefore he flies for Refuge to *Jesus Christ*, that he may obtain Peace with God. If he professes a *Hope of Heaven*, it implies in it that he is endeavouring to prepare for this Heaven, for every Man that hath this Hope purifieth himself. If he professes to take *Christ* for his Example, it implies a Desire and Attempt to imitate our blessed Lord in Self-denial, Patience, Zeal. &c.



In order to make this Profession of our *Faith and Hope* credible, it is the Custom of some Churches to require no more than the Person's own general Profession that he does *believe*, and *repent*, and *hope*, as in *Acts* viii. 37. *I believe, &c.* It is the Custom of other Churches to desire also some further Evidences of the Truth of his *Faith, Hope, and Repentance*, by a more particular Account of some of those Things which are imply'd in the Exercise of those Graces; and this has been usually called, tho' not properly, the *rendering a Reason of the Hope that is in him*, as 1 Pet. iii. 15.

The *first* of these Methods hath considerable Advantages towards the Enlargement of particular Churches; and, so far as I can judge, such Churches seem to require all that is absolutely necessary to the *Nature and Being* of a Church of *Christ*.

The *second* has also some valuable Advantages towards the *well-being* of a Church, and the Purity and the Profit thereof in the inward and experimental Parts of Christianity, tho' some Persons of extream Bashfulness may have been hereby discouraged and hindered from Christian Communion.

Both of these Methods has some Advantages, and some Inconveniencies; and it is not my Design at present to decide which of the two has the greatest; but this is certain, that every Church must judge for itself how large, or how narrow; how general, or how particular a *Profession*

*fession* of Christianity must be, in order to render it *credible* to themselves; yet let each Church take heed that they make not the Door of Admission larger or straiter than Christ has made it.

The *second Sort of Christian Duties* are those that are necessary to practise Christian Communion, (especially if constant Communion be desired) such as, to meet at the same Time, and in the same Place with some Church of *Christ*, to perform Christian Worship with them there, to agree to the general Methods of Worship, the Customs, Order, and Discipline that are practised in that Church, so far as they can find them agreeable to the Will of *Christ* in his Word, or so far as they are necessary to maintain the Being, Order and Peace of all religious Societies. This is so much, and so plainly implied in the very Nature of Communion or Fellowship, that it is always supposed to be consented to, even where it is not expressly mentioned; this will appear more evident under the next *Question*.

This *Profession of Consent* to the Worship or Order of that Church, does not forbid or prevent any Person from attempting to reform any Mismanagements in the Worship or Discipline of the Church by Argument and friendly Persuasion; but only it restrains him from all tumultuous and irregular Proceedings, in order to such Reformation; according

ing to the great Canon of the Apostle, *let all Things be done decently, and in Order*, 1 Cor. xiv. 40. It is upon this account he forbids the *Corinthians* to speak with unknown Tongues without Interpretation, to break in upon the publick Worship, or for several Persons to speak all at once, &c. and such natural Rules of Decency as these, may, in some Sense, be called the *Commands of our Lord*, Ver. 37. to which we owe a professed Subjection.

But if a Man cannot consent to the most constant and essential Forms of Ministration, Worship and Discipline, as practised in that Church, it is far better that he should join himself to some other Society, whose chief Practices and Government are more agreeable to his own Sentiments.

SECT. IV. The *third* Thing that goes to make up the Credibility of our Profession, is *such a blameless and holy Practice in Life, as may make the Profession of the Lips appear, in the common Judgment of Men, to be the sincere Sense of the Heart*: By which we are not to understand a Perfection of Virtue, or a Freedom from every Vice; for there is *no Man* living on Earth, *that does good, and sins not; in many Things we offend all*; and the best of men have Reason to complain, that the *Evil they would not do*, sometimes prevails  
over

over them, and they are *led captive to the Law of Sin*, Jam. iii. 2. Rom. vii. 19, 20.

But it is necessary that Persons professing Christianity should be free from all gross and scandalous Sins, nor be guilty of those Crimes in their allowed Practice, which in many Places of Scripture exclude Men from the Kingdom of Heaven; 1 Cor. vi. 9. *Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither Fornicators, nor Idolaters, nor Adulterers, nor Thieves, nor Covetous, nor Drunkards, nor Revilers, nor Extortioners, shall inherit the Kingdom of God.* 1 Cor. v. 11. *I have written unto you not to keep Company, if any Man that is called a Brother be a Fornicator, or covetous, or an Idolater, or a Railer, or a Drunkard, or an Extortioner, with such an one, no not to eat:* And if this Text forbids us to keep free and sociable Converse with such Persons, or to sit down at our Tables with those who profess Christianity, and practise Wickedness, much more does it become a Church to exclude them from its sacred Society and Fellowship, and to forbid them to sit down at the Table of the Lord. Common Railers and Slanderers, such as the Apostle James describes, are to be shut out from Communion; James i. 26. *If any Man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his Tongue, but deceiveth his own Heart, this Man's Religion is vain;* that is, his religious Performances are evidently



evidently ineffectual for his own Salvation; therefore while he indulges his Tongue in a scandalous Liberty, his Pretences and Profession of Christianity are vain and incredible, and consequently he has no Right to Christian Communion. The Glory of God who is holy, the Honour of our Lord *Jesus Christ* who is our Pattern of Holiness, the Credit of the Gospel which is a Doctrine according to Godliness, as well as the common Sense of Mankind, exclude all such Persons from Societies of strict and pure Religion.

In the very first dawning of the Gospel, *John the Baptist*, the Forerunner of *Christ*, forbid the professing *Pharisees* from Baptism, for want of *Fruits of Repentance* answerable to their Profession, *Mat. iii. 7, 8.* And in following Times the *Ephesian* Converts made their Faith appear by *confessing* what they believed, and *shewing their Deeds.* *Acts xix. 18, 19.* And if there be not a frequent Account of such Instances in Scripture, it is because the Nature and Reason of Things render the Necessity of it sufficiently evident without many express Instances.

The Enquiry of a Church into the Conversation of the Person who desires its Communion, may be adjusted and regulated under these four Heads, (*viz.*) whether he be *sober, just, and good*, as well as *religious*. So much of these four Characters as lie within the publick Observation of the World, are

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necessary in order to become a Member of the Church.

1. Whether he be *sober and temperate* in some good Measure; free from the Vices of Drunkenness, Uncleanneſs, violent Wrath, Railing, Revenge, &c. for otherwise it is plain he cannot belong to *Chriſt*, *they that are Chriſts have crucified the fleſh with its Affections and Luſts*, Gal. v. 24. and the foregoing Scriptures I have cited run much upon this Point.

2. Whether he be *juſt and honeſt* among his Neighbours, a Man of fair dealing, faithful to his Word, ſincere and without Hypocriſy in the common Affairs of Life; for if a Perſon be of a deſigning, tricking and deceitful Temper and Carriage among Men, how can we truſt his Profeſſion in the Things of God? or receive it as credible? Beſides, the *Unjuſt* are expreſſly excluded the Kingdom of God, 1 Cor. vi. 8. *And all Liars ſhall have their Part in the burning Lake*, Rev. xxi. 8.

3. Whether he be *good, kind, charitable*. Whether he hath that *Love to his Neighbour* which is the *fulfilling* of the Duties of the ſecond Table, Rom. xiii. 8, 9. Whatſoever we profeſs of Faith, yet *without Love we are nothing*, 1 Cor. xiii. 2. and it may be enquired too what Love he has to Fellow-Chriſtians, for it is an appointed Mark of the Diſciples of *Chriſt*, John xiii. 35. Here-  
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*by shall all Men know ye are my Disciples if ye love one another. If a Man say I love God and hateth his Brother he is a Liar: He that loveth not his Brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?*

1 John iv. 20. Without Love, and particularly to Fellow-Christians, he can never be fit for such a holy Fellowship, which is to be managed all in Love, and whereof Love is one of the greatest Duties.

4. Whether he be *religious and godly*. Though inward Piety is chiefly to be known to Men by the Profession of the Mouth, and the two foregoing general Heads in some Measure answer this End, yet there should be some Appearances of Piety also in our Conversation in the World, in order to give us a full Right to Christian Communion. In such an Enquiry as this, at least it must be found that such a Person is not a Scoffer at Religion, that he does not make a Jest of Things sacred, that he uses the Name of God with Reverence in common Conversation, that he speaks honourably of *Christ*, and his Gospel, and his Ordinances upon just Occasion, and that he frequents some Places of religious Worship; for we are to *look diligently* that there be *no profane Person* in our Churches, as well as *no Fornicator*, Heb. xii. 15.

Thus I have given a particular Account of those *three Things* that join to make up  
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the *Credibility of our Profession*, in order to be regularly admitted to the Communion of a Christian Church.

SECT. V. *Objection*. But why must there be so many Things required to make a Profession of Christianity credible in our Day, beyond what was required in the primitive Times? Then they only confessed *Christ to be the Messiah, the Son of God, or that he was raised from the dead* in order to Baptism and Admission into the Church. So it was when many Thousands were added to the Church in one Day; so the Eunuch when *Philip* baptized him, *Acts viii. 37*. So the *Tailor* and *Lydia*, *Acts xvi.* and many others; or at most, their present Works were thought sufficient to confirm their Confessions, *Acts xix. 18*. *Many that believed came and confessed and shewed their Deeds*, without long Enquiries into the whole of their Faith, or the Course of their Conversation.

*Answer* 1. The Account that the Scripture gives of these Transactions is very short, yet sufficient to inform us that there was more Discourse on both Sides, in order to the baptizing their Converts, than is expressly written down; for even the Confessions that *Lydia* and *the Tailor* made are not written, but it is said in general, *they believed*; therefore we are not to take it for granted there was nothing else required, because



cause the Scripture in those Places mentions no more than a Word or two of short Confession.

*Ans. 2.* In several Places where such Transactions are recorded in Scripture, there is no mention of their *Works* or *Conversation* at all; and surely no Minister or Church in our Day would imagine, that a mere Confession, *that Jesus is the Christ*, without any further Enquiry either after Knowledge, Faith, or Works, is sufficient Ground for Admission to sacred Ordinances; for then we must take in almost whole Nations. Besides, if a Man did make such a Profession, *that Christ was the Son of God*, and his Conversation were blameless to outward Appearance; yet who of our Ministers, or which of our Churches would receive him without some further Enquiry into his Knowledge of *God*, and *Christ*, and the *Gospel*? Therefore it is sufficiently plain, by the Acknowledgment and Practice of those who make this Objection, that they themselves do not think it necessary to confine their Enquiries only to such a single Sentence of Profession as the Scripture-History expresses, and seek no further.

*Ans. 3.* It is sufficiently evident to me, that the fundamental or necessary Articles of Religion are not the same in all Ages and Places; but more or less Knowledge is necessary, in order to Salvation, according to

the Degrees of divine Revelation in several Nations or Ages. The Belief of the *Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ* was not a fundamental in *Christ's* own Life-time; for when he spake of his own Death, *Peter* replied, *far be it from thee, Lord*, Mat. xvi. 22. *This shall not be unto thee*: And the rest of the Apostles knew not certainly that *Christ* should rise from the dead, for *some* doubted even after his Resurrection, Mat. xxviii 17. Yet they were the Chief of the Church of *Christ* upon Earth at that Time. So in the very first Promulgation of the Gospel, before *Judaism* was quite destroyed, the Apostles themselves had not so full a Knowledge of Christianity as they afterwards, by Degrees, received from the Instructions of the blessed Spirit. Many Passages of Scripture discover this, as *Acts* x. and xv. and *Gal.* ii. &c. At this Time there was scarce any Thing of the New Testament written; and though the Evidences of the Christian Religion were great, yet the Opportunities of a large and extensive Knowledge were exceeding few and small among the common Converts, if compared with our Age: Therefore the *Messiahship of Christ, his Death, and Resurrection, and Exaltation*, with a very few Alterations from *natural* or *Jewish* Religion, seem to be the chief Things then necessary to believe in order to Salvation, or to profess in order to Communion.

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But when in Process of Time the *Jewish* *O**Economy* was divinely destroyed, *C**hristiani**ty* grown to its full Perfection, the Canon of Scripture compleated, and several Christian Truths and Duties more plainly and expressly revealed, it may well be supposed that where this Canon of Scripture is freely published, God may require something more of Christian Knowledge in order to Salvation, than in the very first Years of the Gospel. I speak this last Proposition but modestly, and as a probable Opinion; but if this be true, then it clearly follows that there are more Things necessary to make a Profession of Christianity credible at this Day in most Places of *England*, than were necessary even in *Judea* in the first Years of Christianity.

*Ans**w.* 4. If the *E**ssentials of any Doctr**ine* were perfectly the same in all Ages, yet the *C**redibility of its Profess**ion* is exceeding different, according to different Circumstances of Time, Place and Persons. Where Hardships and Sufferings attend the Professors of any Religion, a very slight Profession of it will persuade me that a Man understands it, and is very sincere in it; because he exposes himself to Suffering by this Means: But where there is full Liberty given, or especially if external Advantages attend it, there every one will be ready to Profess, though he has little Knowledge or Sincerity.

Those first Times of the Gospel, were Times of Reproach and Persecution; the Sect of Christians was every where spoken against, and Death and Dangers attended it on all Sides. Now to confess the Name of *Christ* amidst the Reproaches of the World, against the Opposition of the wise and the foolish, the *Jews* and the *Greeks*, the threatening of Kings, and the Violence of the People, was a more powerful and evident Proof of the Truth of their Faith, than if they had made long Speeches, and had the Testimony of a continued blameless Conversation in a Land and Age of Christians. Surely that Confession, which was sufficient for Martyrdom, if their Enemies knew it; must be sufficient for Communion, when made known to the Church. But in our Age and Nation where Christianity is the Profession of the Time, and the Country, a mere Acknowledgment of the Name, or Death and Resurrection of *Christ*, is not sufficient to prove us knowing or sincere Christians; and there ought to be so much larger a Confession, and so many more credible Circumstances attending it, before we can reasonably, or upon just Grounds, believe a Man to be a true Christian. All these Requirements which I have before mentioned being put together, do not amount to so credible a Profession, as for a Man to say boldly this one Sentence,

*I am*



*I am a Christian*, in the Face of Death and Martyrdom.

*Answe. 5.* I might add also in the last Place, that a great Number of the Conversions of the primitive Christians, were so sudden and surprizing by the extraordinary Effusion of the holy Spirit, that the very Miracle of their Conversion did sufficiently answer the End of a large and particular Confession. The Work of God on the Souls of Men was sometimes in an Instant, and they were made Believers, out of Unbelievers, at once; the *Spirit fell on them while they heard the Word*; and when they who just before professed *Judaism* or *Heathenism*, and neither knew nor loved *Jesus Christ*, confessed his Name and his Religion at once; the wonderful Change was evident to all, and they had no long Accounts to give either of their Faith or Conversion, their Knowledge or Conversation; nor was it required, because the Miracle itself made their Profession sufficiently credible. Besides, spiritual Gifts were conferred on Multitudes in that Day as soon as they were converted, and gave sufficient Evidence for Acceptance unto Baptism, as Acts x. 44, 46, 47. *While Peter yet spake these Words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the Word. For they heard them speak with Tongues and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any Man forbid*  
*Water,*

154      *What are the special, &c. Qu. III.*  
*Water, that these should not be baptized, which*  
*have received the Holy Ghost, as well as we?*

He that well considers all these Things, and sets the Affairs of the primitive Times in a due Light, and thus compares them with our own, will see plainly that something more is necessary to make a Profession of Christianity *credible* in our Day, than was needful in the first Age of the Church. And yet still we may be said to follow the Rules and Examples of Scripture, while we require nothing more in order to Communion than what is necessary to make our *profession credible*; for so much as this has been always required even in Scripture-Times, and the Word of God, and the very Nature of Things seem to demand it.



QUESTION



## Q U E S T I O N   I V .

*What is a Church Covenant ? And whether it be necessary to Christian Communion ?*



BESIDES the Things that have been already mentioned, as included in a *credible Profession* of Christianity, it is worth our Enquiry, whether any *solemn Covenant* be needful in order to Communion. Now to answer this Question we must distinguish between that Communion which is *fixed and constant* in one Church, or that which is only *Occasional*.

By *fixed, constant, and compleat Communion*, I mean the joining myself to a particular Church, so as to become a compleat Member of that religious Society, engaging to perform at appointed Times and Places, my most usual publick Worship with that Society rather than with others, to assist in all Services necessary to support that Society, and partake of all Privileges of it for mutual Edification and Comfort, and to main-

156 *What is a Church Covenant?* QU. IV.  
maintain the publick Honour of *Christ* in  
the World.

By *Occasional Communion*, I understand a mere Participation of the general and special Ordinances of the Gospel with a particular Church for a Time, under the general Character and Claim of Christianity, and so far as Occasions of Providence may make it convenient or desirable. But not to become properly a Member of that particular Society, nor be interested in the Affairs, Regulation or Management of it.

Now for this *Occasional Communion*, there is no Necessity that every such Communicant should enter solemnly into a Covenant or Agreement with that particular Church, any farther than only to partake of those special Ordinances for a Season in a decent and regular Way. It is sufficient for this Sort of Communion, that a Person make such a credible Profession of Christianity as has been before described, or that he be recommended by some other Church, or the Elders thereof, before whom he has made such a credible Profession; or that it be some Way ascertained to the Church whose Communion he desires, that he has done it.

But where *fixed and compleat Fellowship* with a particular Society is desired, the very Nature of Things seems to require it, that there should be such a mutual Agreement among the Persons that intend to practise  
this



this constant Communion. This is part of the *second* Thing requisite to make our Profession credible, (*viz.*) *a professed Subjection to all the necessary Duties of Christianity*, as will plainly appear by what follows.

*A Church* is composed of such Persons as agree to worship and walk together in all the Ordinances of *Christ*, (*viz.*) to attend on the Ministry or preaching of the Word, on praying to God together, on speaking or singing the Praises of God, and celebrating all the Institutions of *Christ*, especially that great one, the Supper of the Lord, which is called *Communion*.

They devote themselves first to the Lord in publick by their Profession, as they have done before in Secret; covenanting to walk with him in all his Ordinances; then they *give up themselves to one another*, and they *receive one another in the Lord*, which is the Word used most frequently in the New Testament for Admission into the Communion of Saints, or being solemnly acknowledged as Fellow-Christians, and consequently as having a Right to special Ordinances. They profess their Agreement or Consent to worship usually together, to attend usually on the Ordinances of Communion as administered in that Church, and to fulfil all necessary Duties of Christian-Fellowship in a special Manner towards one another for mutual Edification, as far as God shall instruct  
and

and enable them: And this is called the *Church-Covenant*, which is in Truth nothing else but a voluntary solemn Agreement with some particular Society, to practise those social Duties of the Christian Religion among them at appointed Times and Places, which *Christ* himself has required in general to be practised somewhere when Opportunity is found.

Such a *Consent or Agreement* to meet at stated Times and Places for social Worship, is not indeed formally instituted in the New Testament: But there are several Passages in the New Testament which very plainly suppose it, as will appear immediately. And the Reason why it was not delivered in the Form of a Gospel Institution is this, because it is a *Principle of Natural Religion*; the Light of Reason teaches it, and upon this Account it was not set down as an Institution under the Old Testament, though doubtless the Patriarchs and holy Men of old practised it, ever since there was any such Thing as publick Worship set up in the World: So the *Israelites* met and read the Scripture, and prayed in their Synagogues without the Formality of a particular divine Institution; wherever a Synagogue was built, the neighbouring Inhabitants by Consent weekly worshipped there.

I confess where Magistrates take upon them to impose a Religion upon the People,

ple, and national and parochial Churches are appointed by some assuming Powers, this *free Covenant* or Agreement degenerates into a *constrained Consent*; but such a free and explicate Agreement is more necessary among those Christians who are left to their own Liberty, or who dissent from a national and established Church.

This *Covenant* has indeed been much censured both by the profane World, and by some Fellow-Christians: And it must be confessed that some few Ministers and Churches of rigid and narrow Principles, have heretofore given too just an Occasion for Censure, by drawing up their *particular Church-Covenants* in a long Form of Writing, and inserting several Things into them that were by no Means necessary to common Christianity, and such as favoured too much of a *Party-Spirit*; but Churches and Ministers in our Age better understand *Christian Liberty* and true *Principles of Charity*. I know of none of these Impositions in our Day; and if our present Practice in this Matter be censured by any, I am persuaded it is merely for want of understanding it: For if it be fairly represented, as I have described it, it appears to be a Piece of mere *natural Religion*, and social Worship; and is so far from being an *Addition* to the Rules of the Gospel, or an *Imposition* on the Consciences of Christians, that no voluntary religious Society

ciety can possibly subsist without some such Covenant. When any Person therefore joins himself to, and becomes a Member of a Christian Church, this Covenant or mutual Agreement is always implied where it is not expressed; and those that have been so weak as to ridicule the Forms of it, yet are so wise as to practise the Substance of it.

Indeed the mere Necessity and Reason of the Thing is so plain and convincing, that one would wonder that any Man should speak against it, if he will but give himself Leave to consider the following Particulars.

1. How can there be a *receiving of each other in the Lord*, at the first forming of a Church, if there be not a mutual Agreement, or *giving up of themselves to each other* to worship the Lord together? Christians are commanded to do it, *that with one Mind and one Mouth they may glorify God.* Rom. xv. 6, 7. And how can any particular Member afterward be received to Communion, if there be not such a Society or Church to receive him, and to which he may give up himself to walk with them in the Lord?

2. How can there be *any social Worship performed*, if there be no Agreement to worship together in the same Place, and at the same Time? If all Christians must always be at perfect Liberty to worship where they will, and communicate every Lord's Day at a different Place, a Minister may sometimes be



be left to preach to the Seats and the Walls, if none are bound to attend on his Ministrations: And on the other Hand, surely the Minister may take as much Liberty as the People; and he may absent himself and worship elsewhere, when they are all gathered together and wait for a Sermon. Thus many Assemblies for Worship may be without a Teacher, and many Teachers without an Assembly, and some small Assemblies have many Teachers

3. How can there be any *Provision made of a proper Place of Worship* for a whole Assembly, or any Conveniences or Decencies that are requisite for sacred Actions, without such an Agreement? How can a Table be appointed or furnished with Bread and Wine, and Vessels to contain them, fit to distribute the Lord's Supper, unless several Persons have agreed upon it?

4. How can the *Minister be maintained* if there be no Societies agreeing to attend on their Ministry, and support and encourage it? Yet this is a Duty incumbent on all those who are ministered unto: *Gal. vi. 6. 1 Cor. ix 13, 14.* Each Society is bound by the Rules of the Gospel to maintain and *honour* their own Ministers *who labour among them in Word and Doctrine.* 1 Tim. v. 17. and 1 Thess. v. 12, 13.

5. How can the *Poor of Christ be fed and clothed*, if Christians are not distributed into

M. distinct

distinct Societies, and each take Care of their own Poor? *Eph.* iv. 28. To whom should the poor Christians have applied of old, if not to their own Societies? For single Persons cannot, nor are they bound wholly to maintain them. They must therefore be distributed into distinct Societies, that every poor Christian may know where to apply for Relief; and that each of the richer may know also to whom they should give their constant Alms, and look upon themselves in a special Manner bound to supply. If all the poor Saints in a Nation were straggling abroad, and belonged to no Christian Society, how should the richer Persons, or richer Societies know these are God's Poor, and of the *Household of Faith*, whom they are bound in a *special* Manner to take Care of, *Gal.* vi. 10. unless they have made a Profession to some Church of *Christ*, and are known by this Means?

So great is the Necessity of these Things to be done by *particular settled Societies*, that Christian Princes and Governors, in order to have these Things regularly performed, have thrown all their Dominions into the Form of distinct *Parishes*, or single *Congregations*; though they have had not much Regard to any Rules of the New Testament, in establishing their Church Worship and Discipline in other Parts of it.

6. How can the *Ordinances of Censure and Excommunication* be ever administered, if there be no Societies agreeing to walk and worship together? If any Person be charged with a Fault or heinous Crime, he will reply, “ He belongs not to any Society, who shall assume a Right to deal with him and “ censure him ?” And it is impossible that the whole visible Church of *Christ* can meet together, or take Cognizance of such particular Causes, and give Censures, unless we set up a Pope, or Council, or Conclave of Cardinals to do all this, and constrain all particular Churches to submit to their sovereign and universal Dictates.

There must be therefore an Agreement betwixt a Company of professing Christians, *giving up themselves to one another, and receiving each other in the Lord*, in order to maintain the Church of *Christ* in the World, his Gospel, or his Honour; to support his Poor, or his Ministers, or the Purity of his Church, or of any holy Ordinance. Receive therefore the Apostles Exhortation. Rom. xv. 6, 7. *That ye may with one Mind and one Mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, receive ye one another as Christ also received us, to the Glory of God.*



## QUESTION V.

*When a Person is once joined to a particular Church, whether he may never worship with other Churches occasionally, or change his fixed Communion to another Church?*



*Answer,* That this Agreement to worship together is not so strictly to be understood, as if none of those Persons should ever worship any where else; for there are various Occasions in the Course of Life that may lead the Members of one Church now and then to worship with another. Since we all hold the same Faith and Worship in the Essentials of it, we are to esteem ourselves in general Communion with the whole visible Church of *Christ*; and sometimes we join in Worship with others, merely to testify our Charity and Christian Fellowship with those that in the Circumstantials of Religion differ from us; sometimes to accompany a particular Friend; to hear a particular Minister; to attend on  
some



some special Occasion of Prayer, or Preaching; on such Occasions we may very reasonably worship with various Assemblies: Or perhaps we may be called to travel from home, and to spend many Seasons of Worship absent from our own particular Community, and then we join with those Churches where Providence may cast us.

When Christians travel where they are unknown, or make any considerable Stay in distant Places, they should carry with them a *Letter of Recommendation* from the Officers or Members of their own Church, to any Churches of *Christ*, where they may come; such are the Letters that *St. Paul* speaks of. 2. Cor. iii. 1. *Do we need Letters of Commendation to you, or from you?* And thus he himself in his Letters recommends Christians to distant Churches, as Rom. xvi. 1, 2. *I commend unto you, Phœbe, our Sister, who is a Servant of the Church at Cenchrea, That ye receive her in the Lord as becometh Saints, i. e. that ye receive her to the Participation of Christian Ordinances, as well as assist her in any civil Affairs.*

This Agreement or Church-Covenant, therefore, only obliges Persons, as far as they can with tolerable Conveniency of Affairs and spiritual Edification, to make that Church, of which they are Members, the usual Place of their Worship, and especially

their Participation of the Lord's Supper, whereby special Communion is maintained.

The Question concerning the *changing of our fixed Communion from one Church to another*, may be thus determined.

All Church-Fellowship is appointed for the publick Honour of God, for our mutual Assistance and Edification in spiritual Things, and for the Support of the Interest and Kingdom of Christ among Men. Whensoever therefore any Member cannot attain these Ends in the particular Church he belongs to, after solemn Consideration and Prayer to God for Counsel, he may desire a Dismission to some other Church, and upon these Reasons the Church ought to give it. A Brother, or a Sister, is not in Bondage in such Cases; and the Pastoral Office, and all Church-Power is for Edification, and not for Destruction, as St. Paul speaks, 2 Cor. xiii. 10.

Now this *Necessity of changing our Communion* may happen several Ways: As when a Person removes his Habitation to such a Distance, as that he cannot conveniently attend and perform the Duties of Church-Fellowship in that Society; or when the Church falls into pernicious Errors and Heresies; or when upon any other Account his own Edification in that Church is not to be attained; or when other necessary Circumstances of Life, or Religion, make his Union to another Church of much more Importance,

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But in these Cases let the Conscience of a Man be well informed, and let him duly consider all Circumstances before he put this in Practice: For it argues a light and changeable Temper to be running always from one Church to another, and unbecoming the Spirit of the Gospel. Yet where the Reasons of removing this Communion from one Church to another are just and good, and after due Application to the Church, if they refuse to dismiss him, he may fairly depart without it, and join himself to any other Church that is satisfied in his credible Profession of Christianity.





## QUESTION VI.

*Whether fixed Communion with some particular Church be a necessary Duty: And whether any may be admitted to occasional Communion, who are no fixed Members of any Church.*



THIS is a natural Enquiry flowing from the former *Question*, Whether any Person is at Liberty to content himself merely with occasional Communion, sometimes with one Church and sometimes with another, without becoming a fixed Member of any Church at all? Or whether a Church may forbid a Person occasional Communion, who refuses utterly to join in any fixed Communion?

The *Duties of holy Fellowship* for the Glory of God and mutual Edification, which are most regularly practised in a State of fixed Communion, are so many, and so plain in Scripture, and in the Reason of Things, that  
very



very few Persons can be exempted from them: For those Duties are such as these, to attend on publick Ministrations together, to pray and confer together about spiritual Things, with a sort of holy Intimacy or Friendship, to encourage and support the Ministry, to maintain the Poor, to uphold the publick Worship of God by assisting in the Provision of a Place, and all other external Things necessary for publick Worship, to receive Members into the Church, to censure and reprove, and cast out scandalous Members, to watch over one another in their holy Conversation, &c. to admonish and to receive Admonitions.

I grant that so many of these Duties as can be conveniently performed toward all Fellow-Christians, should never be omitted where Providence gives just Occasion; but since each Christian cannot watch over all others, worship with all others, assist toward the Maintenance of all the Poor, nor all the Ministers, &c. Those with whom he agrees to worship in a stated Way, are the Persons to whom he is most immediately called to fulfil these kind Offices, and has fairer Opportunities to do it. And as I have shewn before, that publick Worship could never be certainly, regularly and comfortably maintained without such a fixed Communion, and every Person that refuses such Services to *Christ* and the Church, must  
have

have very plain and constraining Reasons to excuse his Neglect.

Besides, the *Privileges of fixed Fellowship* are, or should be, alluring and encouraging; such as, their Opportunities of serving *Christ* in his publick Interest in the World, supporting his Name among Men, their Vote in chusing Ministers or Officers of the Church, and their Interest in the Prayers, Cares and Watchfulness of the Church, for them, and over them, their special Right to the spiritual Assistance of the Ministers and Elders of that Church in private Counsels, Admonitions, and Prayers with them and for them; their own temporal Support, Assistance and Relief by the Church, if they fall into Poverty, &c.

It is my Opinion that scarce any Person can be justly exempted, or excused, from fixed Communion somewhere, but those, who by Reason of their different Opinions, unhappy Temper, or some special Circumstances of Life, are under some Sort of Incapacity of fulfilling several of those Duties, and yet by their credible Profession appear worthy to partake of the special Ordinances of the Church.

And if there be any Person to be found in such Circumstances, I should think it is only such as these. (1.) One that has no fixed Abode, but his Business of Life is at all Uncertainties, and calls him perpetually to change

change his Residence: Such were the Apostles and Evangelists, and the itinerant Preachers of the first Century, together with their Attendants, who seem to be settled Members of no particular Church. Or (2.) Such a one that differs exceedingly in his Sentiments in some important Doctrines, or practical Points of Religion, from all the Churches of *Christ* near him, and yet may be supposed to hold all the necessary Articles of the Christian Faith, but may not be so fit to assist as a Member in the Affairs of a Church of so different Opinions. Or lastly, there may be such a Person as may give some credible Evidences of true Piety in his Heart, but his natural Temper is so violent, his Spirit so various and inconstant, that he can scarce confine himself to the settled Orders of any Community, but will be more likely to divide a Congregation, than to edify it in Love.

Perhaps it may be lawful and proper; nay, I add further, perhaps it is a necessary Duty at some Seasons, and upon very good Evidence of their Christianity, to receive such Sort of Persons as these to occasional Communion, though they have no fixed Relation to any particular Church; and the general Rules of Christianity will oblige them to perform several relative Duties towards their Fellow-Christians, and to help support

support the external Charges of those Churches, with whom for a Season they hold Fellowship.

But after all, I must confess that the special Duties, which belong to a fixed settled Communion of Christians, are so generally plain in Scripture, and so necessary from the very Nature of religious Societies, as described under the 4th *Question*, that in my Opinion, any Church of *Christ* has Reason to make very careful Enquiry into the real Christianity of a Person who desires occasional Communion only, but utterly refuses all Manner of *fixed Communion* with any Church where he has proper Opportunity; unless his Habitation be always unsettled, or his Circumstances very peculiar, or he can give some other just Reason of his Refusal to the Church.

I should also add in this Place, that if Persons should be freely and readily indulged and tolerated in this Sort of *loose Communion*, because they may have some Sort of Appearance of Reason for it, others that have much less Reason, or none at all, might probably demand and expect it; and these Examples would tend greatly to the Dissolution and Confusion of Churches: In such a Case, though it may be barely *lawful*, yet it seems not to be *expedient*, and therefore should not be commonly practised, since it leads to the *Ruin* of Churches, rather than  
to



to their *Edification*. 1 Cor. x. 23. except in Cases extraordinary.

Another very obvious Question arises here, (*viz.*) Whether a Church, or religious Society, may refuse a Person who offers himself to become a fixed Member of that Church in constant and complete Communion, and makes a visible and credible Profession of his Faith? Whether a Church can lawfully forbid such a Person to become a complete Member, and restrain him only to a sort of occasional or incomplete Communion?

*Ans.* Though it is certain that without such fixed Societies or Churches, publick *Christianity* could not be well maintained, and therefore far the greatest Part of *Christians* are certainly obliged to become Members of some particular *Christian* Society; yet as there may be some peculiar Cases which may excuse a Person from fixed Communion and Membership, so there may be peculiar Cases also which may excuse a Church from receiving some Persons to complete Membership with them, though they may admit them to occasional Communion.

Let it be considered, that by admitting a Person to fixed Communion, and making him a Member of that particular Society, he not only acquires a Right to join with the Society in all the Ordinances of the Gospel

pel and special Communion, in publick on the Lord's Days, but he hath a Right to be with them at any more private Meetings of the whole Church, and to consult and act in their special Affairs: He has a Right to attend on such Meetings for considering of the Circumstances and State of the Church, for regulating Things that are amiss, for altering any of their Customs, for distributing Monies to the Poor, for chusing a Pastor or other Officers, for admitting Members, and for exercising the Discipline of the Church, &c. He acquires also a Right in Joint-Partnership to the temporal Possessions of the Society, suppose it be a Meeting-House for publick Worship, Vessels of Plate for Church Communion, or any Houses, or temporal Goods, or Donatives, which may belong to that particular Society.

Now though the Laws of *Christ* require us to receive every visible Christian, who desires it, to Communion in publick Worship, and in special Ordinances of the Gospel, because he is fit for it, yet those Laws do not require that every such Person should be admitted to the peculiar Counsels and Affairs of any particular Society, because perhaps he is really unfit for it. Perhaps they know, or have abundant Reason to believe, that his different Opinions, or his unhappy Temper, or his peculiar Circumstances, would render him a very troublesome Member of it,

it, that he would raise Parties in the Choice of Officers, or in Admission of Members, or in distributing to the Poor, or in the Regulation of other Church-Affairs; and therefore they allow him only *occasional Communion* with them, which is all that seems to be his Duty with Regard to that particular Church, and which is all the Duty which the Laws of Reason, or of Religion, seem to demand of them toward him.

Besides, let it be further considered, that whatsoever Instances of Christian Fellowship in sacred Things the Laws of *Christ* may demand for such a Person, yet it is certain the Laws of *Christ* do not demand for him any Share in the temporal Possessions of that religious Society, nor in the Distribution of their temporal Things, unless it be perhaps to relieve him in some Degree, if he be necessitous. Therefore the Laws of *Christ* do not require that Society to receive such a Person to complete Communion and Membership, to introduce him into their Councils and Affairs, or to vest him in any of their temporal Possessions, since it is evident he will become a very troublesome Member, and endanger, if not destroy, the Edification and Peace of the particular Society or Church. *Let all Things be done to Edification: Follow those Things which make for Peace, and Things whereby one may edify another.*



## QUESTION VII.

*What Knowledge is necessary for  
Christian Communion?*

### SECTION I.



UNDER the *Third Question* I have shewn that the Knowledge necessary to Communion, includes in it both a Knowledge of what is necessary to Salvation, and a Knowledge of what is further necessary to maintain and enjoy this holy Communion: The very Nature of Things requires this.

*First*, let us consider the Things necessary to Salvation. *How many Articles of the Christian Faith or Practice, are necessary to our Salvation; or in other Words, how many Fundamentals are there,* is not expressly determined in any Part of the Scripture. It is a Question that has troubled the Christian Churches almost two hundred Years, ever since the Reformation began, -but has never yet been decided to the common Satisfaction  
even



even of those that held the Scripture to be the only and perfect Rule of Faith and Practice. Therefore as every Man must judge for himself, concerning the *Fundamentals of Christianity*, in Order to examine his own Heart, and evidence to himself his Hopes of Salvation ; so every particular Church must judge for itself, which are the *Fundamentals*, or *necessary Articles of Christianity*, to examine those that propose themselves to Communion, and evidence their Right to it.

I grant this, that in determining the Nature or Number of necessary Articles, the Churches of *Christ* ought to govern their Sentiments by the Rules of Scripture, as near as they can find them, by comparing one Place with another, and form their Judgement in this Matter by a large and extensive Charity. A general Love to Mankind, the dutiful Imitation of God our Saviour, and the exemplary Practice of the blessed Apostles, oblige us to make as few Articles necessary as is consistent with the great Ends of the Christian Religion, and to impose nothing more upon the Consciences of Men in this Respect, than we solemnly believe our Lord *Jesus Christ* himself imposes in his Word, as we will answer it at the great Day of his Appearance. Yet it is certain, and without Controversy, that there are several Articles both of Doctrine and Duty, of such Importance, that a Man cannot be a true Christian without them, nor have any just

Hope of Christian Salvation according to the Gospel; and consequently, without the Acknowledgement of these Articles, a Person may lawfully be refused Communion.

Here let me lay down this Preliminary: That the Fundamentals of Religion (as I have proved before) are very different, in different Ages and Nations, according to the different Degrees of Revelation, and different Advantages for knowing the Truth: But ever since the Time that the Canon of Scripture was finished, and where this Canon is published and acknowledged, we may say in general, and with Regard to Church-Communion, that the Fundamentals of Christianity are the same to this Day; especially in such Places of *Great-Britain, Ireland, &c.* where Persons enjoy so great Degrees of Advantage for obtaining Christian Knowledge. What gracious Allowances for Want of Capacity, or for Want of Means, in dark Corners of *England*, or in *India*, God will make hereafter, is not my Business to enquire into; but certainly, we are to admit none to Christian Communion who have not the Knowledge that is essential to Christianity. And though we cannot precisely reckon up the certain *Number* of essential or fundamental Articles, yet we may lay down such *Characters* of them, as may assist and regulate the Affairs of Christian Communion.

SECT.

SECT. II. We may begin therefore with *Negatives*, and may boldly say, *Those cannot be Fundamentals* either of Faith or Practice, which are not very clearly revealed, either in express Words, or in very plain, easy, and obvious Consequences; they must be such as the meanest Christian may be able to find by reading his Bible, with sincere Desire of Truth, with holy Diligence, and with humble Prayer: For the *Way of Holiness* and Salvation is so plain, *that Fools shall not err therein*. Isa. xxxv. 8. which may be explained by that Text. 1 Cor. i. 26, 27. *Not many wise are called, but the foolish Things of this World, &c.*

Those again *cannot be fundamental* which are only to be found in such Verses of Scripture, the Authority whereof may have been any Way dubious or reasonably suspected. For Fundamentals must have the *strongest Authority*, as well as the *plainest Evidence*, and that for the same Reason. Upon this Account, I would never call that a *Fundamental*, which is not mentioned but in one single Text of Scripture; for it is possible, that such a single Text might be contested by Criticks, or transcribed false, by the Neglect or Iniquity of Men, or be falsely translated, either by Ignorance or Design. Fundamentals must be revealed in several Parts of the Bible, and appear to be the frequent Design and Subject of

the holy Writers; that so the Faith and Salvation of plain Christians might be secured against the Danger of fatal Mistakes, and the Subtilty of Criticks, or cunning Deceivers.

*Such Articles also can never be fundamental*, as have no necessary Influence on the Honour of God, the Good of our Neighbour, or our own Holiness and final Salvation: For since the Honour of God, and the Good of Men, is the very End of the Gospel, that can never be an essential Part of it, without which, these Ends may be happily and gloriously attained.

SECT. III. The plain and *positive Characters* of true fundamental Articles in Christian Religion, seem to be such as these.

1. *Those without which there can be no Religion*: Such as, that there is a God; that this God is to be worshipped, believed, and obeyed; that he governs Man in this Life in Order to a final Judgement; that there is a future State; and Rewards and Punishments hereafter, according to our different Behaviours here.

2. Those also seem to be essential, necessary, and fundamental Articles of the Christian Religion, which are the *chief Points* that raise it above *natural*, or distinguish it from the *Jewish* Religion, and which are represented in Scripture as the *very Foundation and Sub-*



*Substance, the Mystery and Glory, of the Gospel; such are these:*

*That all Mankind are Sinners; are destitute of Holiness and Happiness; and sinful Man cannot recover himself to the Favour and Image of God; and there is no Way of Access to God for him but by a Mediator. John xiv. 6. No Man cometh to the Father but by me: And I take this Doctrine of the Necessity and Use of a Mediator, to be the Groundwork of the Difference betwixt natural and revealed Religion.*

*That this Mediator is the Son of God dwelling in Flesh; or, that the Son of God has taken upon him human Nature for this very End, to become a Mediator: This seems to be properly the great Mystery of the Gospel, and it should be acknowledged without Controversy, that God was manifest in the Flesh. 1 Tim. iii. 16.*

*That Jesus of Nazareth is this glorious Person, this only Mediator. There is one God, and one Mediator between God and Men, the Man Jesus Christ. 1 Tim. ii. 5. If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your Sins. John viii. 24.*

*That, in Order to the Salvation of Man, Christ is appointed by the Father to instruct us, as a Teacher or Prophet; to make an Atonement for our Sins, and to interced for us as a Priest; and to give us Laws, and rule and judge us as our Lord and King: For he has*

frequent, plain, and express Notices in his

Word, that this is the Way whereby he saves us ; and if we know not so much as this of the Method of his Salvation, how can we apply to him for it, or receive it at his Hands with any Degree of Faith?

*That the Lord Jesus Christ is to be believed, trusted in, received, and submitted to, under these several Characters which he sustains, by all that would partake of this Salvation: For if he be absolutely rejected in either of these his Offices, we have no Reason to expect him to fulfil any Part of his Salvation to us, or in us. If we refuse him that speaketh from Heaven as our Prophet, we cannot escape. Heb. xii. 25. If we utterly reject his proper Sacrifice as a Priest, there remaineth no more Sacrifice for Sins, but a certain fearful looking for of Judgement, and fiery Indignation. Heb. x. 26, 27. And if we refuse this Man as a King to reign over us, we shall be slain before his Face. Luke xix. 27. He will take Vengeance on them that obey not his Gospel. 2 Thess. i. 8.*

*That God forgives repenting Sinners, and is reconciled to them, not for the Merit of their Repentances, but for the Sake of what Jesus Christ has done and suffered. This is a very evident Consequent from the former Doctrines, and has a plain and necessary Connection with them. It seems to be the very Substance of the Gospel, that we are justified or saved, not by our own Works, but by the Grace of God abounding to Sinners, through the Redemption*

*demption* which our Lord *Jefus Chrift* hath obtained; and that *Jefus Chrift* *redeemed us from the Curfe*, by bearing that *Curfe for us*; and that God is at Peace with us for his Sake; that the Gospel is the *Word of Reconciliation*; that God was in *Chrift*, reconciling Sinners to himfelf; because he that knew no Sin was made Sin, or a Sin-Offering, for us, that we, who are Sinners, might be made righteous, and accepted of God through him. 2 Cor. v. ult. See Rom. iii. 20, to 25. Ephes. ii. 8, 9. and many other Places.

*That though we cannot obtain the Favour of God and eternal Life by the Merit of our own good Works, yet Faith in Chrift, Repentance of all Sin, and Holinefs of Heart and Life, are neceffary, in Order to our Enjoyment of the final Salvation.* The Scripture is moft exprefs and pofitive in fuch Sort of Articles. *He that believeth not fhall be damned. Except ye repent ye fhall perifh. And, Without Holinefs no Man fhall fee the Lord.* Now by this Article we are bound to refift all Temptations, to ftrive againft and fubdue all finful Appetites and Inclinations, and to praftife all known Duties of Fear, Faith, Love, and Worfhip, towards God; and Juftice, Faithfulnefs, and Kindnefs, toward Men.

*That the Holy Spirit of God is appointed and given to blefs Men with Wifdom and fpiritual Underftanding, to affift them to accept of this Salvation of Chrift, to fanctify them here, and*

*fit them for the full Enjoyment of it hereafter :* For since the Canon of Scripture is compleated, there is a Number of such exprefs Attestations therein, to the enlightning and sanctifying Operations of the Holy Spirit, that he who utterly and in all Senses denies them, seems to deny that there is any Thing for the Blessed Spirit to do amongst Men, since the Day of Miracles was ended. Now since the Gift of the Spirit is one of the most glorious and promised Blessings of the Gospel, a considerable Part of the Gospel seems to me to consist in the Operations of the Holy Spirit; and in this Sense, he that denies the Work of the Holy Spirit, seems to refuse a glorious Part of the appointed Salvation.

Let it be considered also, that we are baptized into the Name of the *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* : And is it not necessary that we should have some general Knowledge and Idea who this Father, Son, and Spirit are, and what is their distinct Concern and Business in Matters of our Salvation, together with their divine All Sufficiency to perform it?

The *Ephesians*, who had never heard of a Holy Ghost, and were baptized only in the Baptism of *John*, might be true Believers without this Knowledge. *Acts* xix. 2, 3. But since we have had such abundant Discoveries of him, and are baptized into his Name, the Case is much altered. How can we accept adult Baptism, or confirm *that* which we passed through



through in Infancy, at our coming into a Church, if we know nothing of the Holy Spirit, nor the Use of him in our Religion?

It might also be added, as a further Argument on this Head, that the *Communion of the Holy Ghost* is the great Gospel-Benediction, joined with the *Love of God*, and the *Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*; as in 2 Cor. xiii.

14. So that our Initiation into Christianity being solemnized in the Name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, our Christian Life and State being maintained by their distinct Offices or Transactions therein, and our Hope of Happiness depending on their divine Benediction, we may reasonably infer, that some Knowledge and Faith of the blessed Trinity are necessary to Christian Salvation.

*That there shall be a Resurrection of the Body* is another such Article; for if the Dead rise not, then is not Christ risen; and if Christ be not risen, your Faith is vain, ye are yet in your Sins. 1 Cor. xv. 16, 17. However this might be doubted by some *Corinthians* before this Epistle was written, yet it cannot safely be doubted now.

*That there is a State of Happiness hereafter prepared for the Saints where Jesus Christ is, and those that refuse his Gospel shall be punished from the Presence of the Lord with everlasting Destruction.* John xiv. 3. 2 Thess. i. 9. These seem to be necessary Motives to work upon our Hope and Fear, and without which the

the Gospel could hardly be supposed to be received amongst Men; and therefore I count them *necessary* and *fundamental* Articles of Christianity.

Thus I have attempted to give some Instances of such Doctrines as seem to be necessary to a Christian Profession, according to the *second* Character of Fundamentals; (*viz.*) *such as raise it above natural Religion, and distinguish it from Judaism, &c. and are represented in Scripture as the Foundation, the Substance, and the Glory of the Gospel.*

3. A third Character by which several Fundamentals may be known, is this: *Those Doctrines or Duties that are expressly made necessary to Salvation in the Word of God, are certainly Fundamentals*: Though the greatest Part of these are such as are either necessary to all Religion under the *first* Head, or are some of the most distinguishing Doctrines of the Christian Religion under the *second* Head; as, *He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek him.* Heb. xi. 6. *That Jesus Christ is the only Way to the Father.* John xiv. 6. *No Man cometh to the Father but by me.* *That Jesus is the Christ: Who is a Liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is Antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son: Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father.* 1 John ii. 22, 23.

The

*The Duties of believing in Christ, Mortification of Sins of the Flesh, and Perseverance in Faith and Holiness, I esteem fundamental and necessary Duties; because the Scripture expressly saith, He that believeth not, shall be damned. Mark xvi. 16. If ye live after the Flesh ye shall die. Rom. viii. 13. If any Man draw back, my Soul shall have no Pleasure in him. Heb. x. 38. And for the same Reason this Error, That Justification is to be attained by the Works of the Law, seems to be an Heresy, or fundamental Error; because the Scripture saith, Christ is become of none Effect to you, whosoever of you will be justified by the Law, ye are fallen from Grace. Gal. v. 4. By which we are to understand such a Hope of Justification by the Law, as made the Sacrifice and Atonement of Christ needless; and which was most probably the Sense of the Heretics in that Day.*

SECT. IV. But here I desire my Readers to take Notice of these *five* Things.

*Note.* 1<sup>st</sup> That I have by no Means pretended to reckon up all the fundamental Articles, or give a full or regular Catalogue of them: There may be some which I have omitted, and some which I have mentioned twice, and that are included in each other. I have only laid down some general *Tokens* or *Marks*, whereby necessary Truths and Duties  
may

may be known, so far as the Terms of Christian Communion are concerned therein.

*Note 2d* I have here joined several doctrinal and practical Articles together, supposing that all those Duties which the Scripture makes necessary to be practised, are necessary also to be known in order to practise.

*Note 3d* I call these Articles fundamental ; and it is my Opinion that they may be insisted on as necessary to Communion, because they seem to me necessary to true Christianity, in such an Age and Land of Light as ours is. Yet, what I hinted before I repeat now, that, as I will not judge all the *Heathen* World, and condemn them for want of *Christian Knowledge*, so neither will I utterly condemn every poor Soul in the obscurest Corners of a Christian Nation, for Want of such Degrees of Knowledge as to me seem necessary to Salvation, to all that know and read the New Testament. I grant, that God, in his Word, does not seem to give Encouragement to their Hope of Heaven, nor allow their Communion with Christians on Earth : But the final Condemnation of them is alone with him. And after all that we can say, every Person must judge for himself, which Articles are necessary in Order to his own Salvation ; and every Church must judge for itself, to regulate its own Communion ; and God alone is a superior Judge, with Regard to the one or the other.

*Note*



*Note 4th* I do not think every one of these Articles necessary to be expressly insisted on, and professed by every Communicant ; but so many only as the Church shall think necessary, in Order to give them a reasonable Satisfaction that he knows and believes the rest.

*Note 5th* Though I esteem it necessary that every Communicant make known his Belief of such Articles as the Church judges fundamental and necessary some Way or other, yet I am far from confining him to any proposed human Forms of Expression ; as I shall shew under the *next Question*.

SECT. V. I proceed now to the *second* Sort of Knowledge that is necessary to Christian Communion ; and that is, a *Knowledge of all those Things that are necessarily implied in the Enjoyment or Practice of this Communion* ; or, in short, thus : We must know what Communion is, and how to communicate, before we can practise this Duty.

This Sort of Knowledge includes these Particulars.

1. If I should say it is necessary to be *baptized* before we communicate at the Lord's Table, I should have far the greatest Part of Christians on my Side ; and if *Baptism* be necessary, it is necessary also to know the Nature of Baptism, the End and Design of Baptism, the Meaning of being baptized in the Name of the Father, Son, and Spirit, and the  
Manner

Manner of performing it, whether it must be done by dipping or sprinkling, or whether both be not lawful, and whether Baptism in Infancy be sufficient.

2. It is necessary also, that a Person should know what is the Nature of the *Lord's Supper*; that it is to be performed by breaking of Bread, and distributing that and the Wine amongst a Christian Assembly; that the Bread and Wine are both to be blessed, and what is the Nature of that Blessing; what the Bread and Wine represent; what is the Design of breaking and distributing them; who are the Persons that must do this: And a Woman must know, whether Women are to be admitted to the Lord's Supper.

3. That several Persons, who make a credible Profession of Christianity, must agree to meet together for Christian Worship, at the same Time, and in the same Place, in Order to celebrate this Ordinance; and that it is not to be received alone, because it is an Ordinance of Communion.

Without the Knowledge of these Things, I do not see how any Person can communicate in the sacred and special Ordinances of the Gospel in an orderly Manner, or with spiritual Profit.

Thus have I endeavoured to open the Way for Persons to form their Judgement upon this difficult and important Question, What are those *Articles of the Christian Religion, the Know-*

*Knowledge of which is necessary to Communion;* and I hope I have kept the middle Way between a *Libertinism of Principles*, and a narrow *uncharitable Spirit*: Wherein I have failed, I shall be glad to be set right in a Spirit of Meekness.





## Q U E S T I O N   V I I I .

*In what Words and Expressions must our Faith be professed, in Order to Communion? And in what Manner must we profess it?*

### S E C T I O N   I .



HIS has been a famous and notable Question in all Ages of the Church. National Churches, Synods, Assemblies or Councils of Bishops, Presbyters, and learned Men, have established certain Sets of *fundamental Articles* and *express Forms of Confession*; and by these *Forms* Persons are to be tried, that desire Admission to their Communion. Others, who have thought this Yoke and Burden imposed upon the Conscience too heavy and intolerable, have maintained, that no Forms of Confession are necessary, besides the very *Words of Scripture*; and that he who agrees to these *Words*, has a Right to Christian Communion, though perhaps he may understand  
or



QU.VIII. *In what Words and Manner, &c.* 193  
or explain them in a Sense never so different<sup>t</sup>  
from the Church, whose Communion he  
desires.

Now to speak my own Sentiment with  
Freedom here, I think these are *two Ex-*  
*trems*; and the best *Medium* that I can find  
for all the Purposes of Peace and Truth is,  
that *every Man should confess his Faith in his*  
*own Words*, which I shall endeavour to make  
evident by a particular Review of each  
Method.

I grant, that it seems a very natural and  
plausible Argument, that since God has  
written down all needful Christian Truths  
and Duties in the holy Scripture, we can  
chuse no better Words to confess them in,  
than those which God himself has given us  
for our Instruction in those Truths and Du-  
ties: But if we consider the Affairs of the  
Christian World, the Experience of Man-  
kind, the Practice of Hereticks and Decei-  
vers, as well as the Reason of Things, we  
shall find that, though the Words of Scrip-  
ture are sufficient to teach us all the necessa-  
ry Parts of Christianity, yet the mere Repe-  
tition of them, or Subscription to them,  
cannot give sufficient Proof, that the Person  
so professing, has any Understanding of them;  
or has any true Christian Knowledge. An  
*Ideot*, or an *idle Boy*, may learn twenty of  
the noblest and most comprehensive Sen-  
tences of Scripture without Book; a very  
O *ignorant*

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*ignorant Person*, or a Man of most *erroneous*  
and destructive Principles may repeat any  
Words of Scripture, and profess to believe  
them, while the one has a quite contrary  
Meaning under those Words, and the others  
have no Meaning at all. Now surely such  
Sort of Professions can never be counted a  
sufficient Evidence of Christian Knowledge,  
and consequently can never give him a Right  
to the holy Communion.

But because this Point is of great Importance, I shall debate it at large as a distinct *Question* by itself.

SECT. II. It will be replied then immediately, *If the Words of Scripture are not a sufficient Test in this Case, may not Confessions of Faith, drawn up by wise and good Men, be made a Test of Christian Knowledge?*

I answer, No, by no Means; and that for these three Reasons: It will admit such as ought not to be admitted, it will exclude such as ought not to be excluded, and it will endanger or infringe Christian Liberty.

1st, *This may admit such Persons as ought not to be admitted*; for such Forms of Doctrine, drawn up by other Men, will be liable to the same *Inconveniencies* that will attend any scriptural Form of Words: A *Child*, or an *Idiot*, may learn and repeat them by Heart; a very *ignorant Person*, or one who is very *erroneous*, may profess and subscribe them

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them in his own Sense: For when such Forms have continued some Time in the World, Men of very heretical Notions and Tempers, being in Danger of being excluded from the Church by such a Test, will contrive and find how to put some perverse Sense upon the Words, and thus evade the Force, and disappoint the Design of them, as they have done in all Ages with the Words of Scripture.

2dly, *This may exclude such Persons as ought not to be excluded*: For if a Person of a truly Christian Spirit, and of a pious and unblemished Character should happen to differ from this Form of human Articles but in one Sentence, or even in one Word, he cannot honestly assent to, nor subscribe the whole Form, though he is perfectly of the same Mind in all Things, except in that minute Point; and yet for this little inconsiderable Difference, he must be excluded the Communion of the Church, and perhaps be liable to all the immediate Inconveniencies of such an Exclusion, as much as if he denied every Article.

There are no *Synods*, or *Councils* of Christian *Bishops* or *Presbyters* (even though the *Laity* have been mingled with them) but have put into their Articles and Confessions some little Party Notions, as well as the great and necessary Truths of the Gospel. They have ever had an Itch to determine some

Questions about *Meats*, and *Days*, and *Circumstances*, and *Ceremonies*, either in Faith or Worship, as well as the *most undoubted and fundamental Points* of Christianity. *Mint*, and *Anise*, and *Cummin*, have been ever creeping into Confessions of Faith among the weightier Matters of *Faith* and *Love*. Now if subscribing to a whole Set of Articles be the Test of Communion, then for not eating *Flesh* or *Herbs*, or for want of the *Anise* and the *Cummin*, a Man is excluded the Church as much as if he wanted *Faith* and *Love*; which is a most unreasonable Thing, and would directly contradict that great Canon of the Apostle, Rom. xiv. 1. *Him that is weak in the Faith receive ye, but not to doubtful Disputations.*

3dly, *It will endanger or infringe Christian Liberty.* The Imposition of human Forms of Profession has been a heavy Burden and sore Bondage, under which most Parts of the Christian Church have groaned in almost every Age. It has been a sore *Temptation* to many Thousands to strain and subdue those Words to new Significations, to various and very foreign Senses, in order to bend their Consciences to a Compliance with them; and it has oftentimes been made a hateful *Engine* and Instrument of Quarrels and Schisms, of Reproaches and sharp Persecutions to many sincere and honest Souls, that could not warp their Sincerity, nor sub-  
due



due their Consciences to such a Compliance. Whence arises the Severity of the Inquisition in *Spain* and *Portugal*, and the Compliances of the *Jews* there, to profess the *Roman* Faith? It is true, no human Method is perfectly free from all Inconveniencies, yet I would not willingly encourage such a Method which has often had such mischievous and impious Effects, and has always such Danger attending it.

Yet I am very much of the Mind that *Articles of Religion, Confessions, Catechisms*, and short *Summaries of the Christian Faith*, are very useful and necessary amongst the Churches of *Christ* for several Reasons; and particularly,

1. *To give a short and compendious View of the chief and most necessary Points of the Christian Religion, which lie scattered up and down in many distant Places of Scripture:* And for this Reason, such Books are very profitable for all Christian Families, to teach the Young and the Ignorant the Sum and Substance of what they must believe and practise in order to Salvation; for though every Thing necessary be plainly contained in the Word of God, yet Persons that have little Time, and little Knowledge, and very weak Reason, would be at a great Loss to collect all their Faith and Duty from so large a Book as the Bible is, without some Teacher. They would want some In-

gether in an easy Method, or some *Systems*, *Confessions*, or *Catechisms*, wherein it is done already. Though these *Catechisms* and *Confessions* should be examined by the Word of God, so far as every Person is capable, and should be no farther received than they bear a Conformity thereto by all that are capable of such Examination.

2. Such Articles, or Summaries of the Christian Religion, are useful *to hold forth to the World what are in general the Sentiments of such a particular Church, or Churches*: And as this is proper on many Accounts, so it is of Use in order to make the Way to their Communion evident and easy, and that other Christians may know whether they agree with them in what is essential to Christianity, and may judge, whether they should seek or desire constant or occasional Communion with them; and that other Churches may judge whether they should admit their Members to Communion: This also may tend to encourage more zealous and hearty Consultations, and mutual Assistances toward the Support of their common Christianity, provided that these Articles are drawn up with Judgement; and these Things are managed with Prudence and Charity.

Such are, or should be, the *Articles of the Church of England*, which proclaim her Doctrine and Discipline to the World: Such  
are

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are, or should be, the *Westminster Assembly's Confession of Faith*, or that of the *Savoy*, and the two *Catechisms*, which shew the Faith and Worship of the *English Dissenters*: Such are, or should be, the *Confessions of the foreign reformed Churches*; of all which it may be said in general, they are very good Summaries of the Christian Religion, however they may differ in lesser Points and Circumstances. All these have been of unspeakable Advantage in the Churches of *Christ*, not only to train up Children and Families in the Knowledge of divine Truths, but to hold forth to all the World upon what Foundations the *Protestant Churches* are built, and to declare what their Faith is, and what their Practice.

I would not be understood, as though I thought such *Confessions of Faith* necessary to be drawn up and kept in all Churches for these Ends; for many of the primitive Churches for a hundred Years or more, managed their Affairs without any such formal *Confessions*, at least without any so large ones, generally approved and delivered down to Posterity. The constant Preaching and Praying in the Churches, and mutual Communication of Christians, did notify to their Fellow-Christians and Fellow-Churches, their Consent in the most necessary and important Articles of Faith and Worship. But it is certain, that since Churches are more

multiplied, and Errors more abundantly increased, there are many Expediencies that attend such a declared and publick Consent, or Harmony of several Churches, in the same general Points of Doctrine and Duty.

I grant that there have been some great Inconveniencies attending these *national Confessions and Articles*, such as the nailing down certain Degrees of Reformation to everlasting Imperfection, and the settling some Mistakes for whole Nations and future Ages; we in *Great-Britain* need not run far to seek for Instances of this, whether we dwell in the *North* or *South* Part of it.

But these Inconveniencies may be avoided, if we and our Fathers had but observed two Things. (1.) That such Articles need not be drawn up in the strictest Terms of any particular Party, but with Allowance of some just *Degrees of Latitude* for different Sentiments; nor let such Articles descend into a Determination of too many Particulars in Things that are of little Moment in Christianity; and (2.) I would have it always secured, that this precise Form of Words be never imposed on any Person whatsoever as a Test of Christianity, of Communion, of Ordination, &c. to be subscribed or acknowledged by *Affent* or *Consent*; at least it ought never to be done without the Allowance of such *Limitations, Explications, and Exceptions* which might secure



secure the Consciences of pious Christians from all unnecessary Bonds and Fetters.

SECT. III. The only Way therefore that I know of to secure the *just Christian Liberty*, both of Churches and Persons, is this, *That every Person who proposes himself to Communion must confess his Faith in his own Words*; or by an open and friendly Conference with the Ministers, Officers, or deputed Persons of the Church, he must give them Satisfaction in what Sense he understands the holy Scriptures, inmomentous and fundamental Points; and make it appear that he knows and believes all the necessary Articles of Christianity: And, as I said before, they must take Heed not to make more Articles necessary than *Christ* has done by the Rule of his Word, and they should acknowledge themselves satisfied with such a Profession, as may be sufficient to manifest a Person to be a good Christian, without descending into nice Particularities of Opinion, and Points of less Importance. Whether Persons of divided Sentiments in lesser Matters should be received to fixed or to occasional Communion only, shall be discussed afterward.

Where there is any just Ground of Suspicion that a Person holds such Errors, as in the Opinion of the Church are exceeding dangerous, if not damnable, there surely the  
Church

Church has a Right to require that he declare himself free from those Errors, and give his Sense of Scripture in Opposition to them, so far as to give Satisfaction to the Church : But he is not bound to do it in any Form of Words proposed to him, or imposed upon him by others ; but only in Words of his own chusing ; because the Design of their Enquiry, and of his Confession, is to profess his own Sense of Scripture, or his own Faith, and not theirs : And the Church must afterward judge, whether the declared Sense of the proposed Communicant, or Candidate, agree with their Sense, sufficient for Communion in the special Ordinances of the Gospel.

Hereby the Truth and Extent of a Man's own Knowledge is much better found out, than by any Form of Words whatsoever, human or divine, that can be proposed to him for Assent or Subscription. Hereby the Liberty of the Person desiring Communion is secured from Impositions, in that he is not confined to any Set of Words, but has the whole Range of his Mother-Tongue to tell what he believes, and to express his own Sense of Scripture. Hereby the Church also has its full Liberty of judging the Character and Profession of the Person admitted to their Communion, whether he believe the Words of Scripture in such a Sense, as the Church thinks necessary to Salvation,  
and

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and sufficient for practising and enjoying this sacred Fellowship.

This is the Way to deal with others, as we would think it reasonable others should deal with us, according to the *Rule of our blessed Saviour*. This is acting according to the professed *Protestant Principle*, not to impose on the Conscience of others, but to let every one judge for himself concerning his own personal Actions, and let the Church judge for itself concerning its social Actions.

Thus by the Influence of the blessed Spirit, which is a Spirit of Truth and Peace, Christians may walk together by this Rule, to the Glory of God and their own Edification; and Peace and Truth may be honourably maintained, so far as we are capable in this imperfect State.

SECT. IV. An Enquiry may arise here, *Whether a Confession of Faith in writing may not serve the same Purposes, as well as a Conference?*

It is my Judgement that no Confessions of Faith, delivered in writing, can be sufficient to give Evidence of Christian Knowledge, except there has been some personal Conference before or after the writing of this Confession, whereby it may appear that the Person well understands what he has written; or at least, unless there  
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be some other very evident and convincing Proofs that the Person who writes is truly sincere, and would not dare to impose upon a Church, by any written Confession, *that* which is not the real Belief and Sense both of Head and Heart.

And by this Means that Scandal and Reproach will be taken away from the Churches, of receiving Members merely upon a written Confession of Faith and Hope, which perhaps was drawn up by some other Hand, and which has neither been the Work of the Head, nor Heart of the Person who desires Communion.



QUES-





## Q U E S T I O N IX.

*Where the Seclusion from Christian Communion carries temporal Inconveniencies with it, hath a particular Church the Power to seclude a Person merely for want of Orthodoxy?*

### S E C T I O N I.



SINCE I have put the Test of Knowledge sufficient for Christian Communion upon the final Judgement of the Church, and their Satisfaction in the Orthodoxy of a Communicant, it is necessary I should answer this great *Objection*, (*viz.*) Suppose a *Socinian*, a professed *Pelagian*, or an *Antinomian* of the grossest Kind, should declare that he has been very sincere in searching the Scriptures to find the Truth, should he be secluded from Communion, because he doth  
not

not appear in his Confession orthodox enough to satisfy the Church? And is it not somewhat like Persecution, when being rejected by the Church he shall lie under some Reproach, and sustain temporal Damage in his Reputation among his Neighbours?

*Ans. 1.* It is certain that Persons who give not just Evidence of true Christianity, ought not to be received to the special Ordinances of Christian Worship, and enjoy Christian Communion: Now those who believe not the necessary, fundamental, and essential Doctrines of the Christian Religion cannot properly be called true Christians, whatsoever general Profession they may make of believing the Bible, or being the Disciples of *Christ*: Therefore such are not to be received.

A Man may profess to be very sincere in searching the Scriptures to find out Truth; but of real inward Sincerity, as well as inward Christianity, God only is the Judge; and how valuable a Qualification soever Sincerity may be, (if it could be found in any Persons in *England* who are not true Christians) and how far soever it may go towards Acceptance with God in the Secret of his Mercy, yet it is not the Profession of *Sincerity*, but of *Christianity*, that gives a Person Right to the Fellowship of a Christian Church: For God in his revealed Word has not bid us receive all that are *sincere*, but all that believe

or have *received Christ*, or all that profess to be true Christians. And in this Case I know no Judge on Earth superior to the Church, with which Communion is desired, and the Officers thereof. These must determine whether the Profession of Christianity be credible, or no, as I have proved before under the second Question.

*Ans. 2.* Those temporal Inconveniences that a Man may happen to sustain among his Neighbours, by being excluded from a particular Church for want of true Faith, are no Part of that Church's Act in refusing him, nor a necessary Consequent thereof; but only a mere occasional or accidental Inconvenience, to which all human Affairs are subject in this imperfect State. Now this is evident, because in a *Heathen Nation* the Rejection of a Person from a Christian Church for want of such Faith would be honourable, and his Neighbours would like him the better for it; though it happens in a *Christian Nation* that his Neighbours may reproach him; but still this Event is no Part of the Church's Act, who ought to love him as a Man, and do all due Offices of Kindness to him, even while they cannot receive him as a true Christian.

*Ans. 3.* Though we are not to do the least Hurt to any Person because he doth not hold the Christian Faith, yet we are allowed and encouraged to love good Christians better

ter than those that are not so : We are commanded to *love our Enemies, and do good to them that hate us*, Mat. v. 44. but we are told, Mat. x. 41, 42. that *he that doth the least Benefit to a Prophet or Disciple, as such, shall have a peculiar Reward*. We are in a special Manner required to *love the Brotherhood*. 1 Pet. ii. 17. *to love one another*. John xv. 12, 17. *and to do good to all, but especially to the Household of Faith*, Gal. vi. 10. Nor can the with-holding that Degree of Love from an *Heathen*, which belongs to a pious *Christian*, be justly called *Persecution or Hardship*, any more than my Neighbour may complain that I persecute him, because I do not love him so well as my Brother, or my Father.

Give me Leave to add in this Place, that though the temporal Inconvenience of Shame or Disreputation is not the necessary Consequent of an Exclusion from a Church for *want of Faith*, yet these Inconveniencies may certainly and justly attend the Exclusion of a Person for *want of good Morals*. And St. Paul plainly intimates it, 1 Cor. v. 9, 10, 11. where he permits them to *keep Company with heathen Fornicators, Extortioners or Idolaters*, and to eat with them if *they are invited*, Chap. x. ver. 27. But he forbids them to allow the same Degree of Civility to a *Fornicator, Extortioner, or Idolater, who calls himself a Brother, or a Christian, with such*



*such a one*, he says, *we should keep no Company, not so much as to eat with him.* So in 2 *Theff.* iii. 6, 11, 14. concerning disorderly Christians and *Busy-bodies that will not work* to maintain themselves, the Apostle says, *Withdraw yourselves from every such Brother*, which may signify a *Withdrawment* from spiritual or from civil Communion with him, or perhaps include both. He forbids the *Theffalonians* to have any *Company with him*, *that he may be ashamed*; and the Reason seems to be this: These Practices are justly accounted shameful by the Light of Nature, and among the *Heathens*; now when a Man professes so holy a Religion as *Christianity* is, and yet practises these shameful Vices, he is guilty of a double Crime, and aggravates his Iniquity; he is a Hypocrite and a Deceiver, as well as a vicious Man, and the Apostle exhorts the Church to make him know and feel the Shame of it.

SECT. II. Another *Objection* a-kin to the former, seems naturally to rise here, and to want an Answer too, (*viz.*) Suppose a Man be a real and hearty Christian, holding all the necessary Articles of the Christian Faith, and he proposes himself to Communion with a Church of narrow and uncharitable Principles, who make more Fundamentals than *Christ* has made, shall such a Man be excluded from Communion, mere-

ly for want of Orthodoxy in the Judgement of an unskilful Church?

*Answer.* Without Doubt it is a criminal Thing in any Assembly, or Church of *Christ*, to imagine and create new Fundamentals, and impose them upon others, or to establish narrow and uncharitable Rules of Communion; yet it is possible that such a Church may act in the Sincerity of their Hearts, for the Honour of *Christ*, and the Purity of his Ordinances; many such Churches there have been in our Age, and more in the Age of our Fathers; and though it be faulty in them to exclude true Christians, yet they must still be the visible Judges of the Fitness of Persons for their own visible Communion, and they are accountable for their Conduct only to *Christ*, their supreme Lord and Judge.

It is better, in my Opinion, therefore, that a Person who is a real Christian, should join himself to some other distant Church, though it may be with some Inconvenience; or perhaps it may be better that he should live without Ordinances of special Communion, which are not absolutely necessary to Salvation, than that he should break the settled Peace of a Church, which walks with God in Faith, and Holiness, and Comfort, though their Principles of Communion may be a little too narrow and uncharitable, and not to be vindicated. No  
Man

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Man ought to come into a voluntary Society, and become a Member thereof, without the Consent of the Society, though perhaps they unjustly refuse to give their Consent. They must answer it to *Christ*, their Judge, at the great Day. There is nothing in this World perfectly free from all Inconveniencies; Prudence and Christianity ever direct us, of two Evils, to chuse the least.





## QUESTION X.

*Whether a Profession to believe the express Words of Scripture, without any Explication, be an Evidence of Knowledge sufficient for Christian Communion?*

### SECTION I.



THOUGH what I have already said under the former *Questions*, might be sufficient to answer the present Enquiry, yet since in several Ages of the Church, and especially in Times of rising Error this Controversy has been moved, I shall spend some Time in sifting it thoroughly, and endeavour to lead my Reader to such a Determination of it, as may give a just Satisfaction to an honest and humble Enquirer.

By the *express Words of Scripture*, I here intend the Words expressed in our *English Bible*; or the original *Greek and Hebrew Words*



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Words translated into some other *English* Words; for it is evident, that the *Greek* and *Hebrew*, can be of no Use to admit plain Christians into *English* Churches.

When I say *without any Explication*, I mean, without explaining the Sense of those scriptural Words so translated, by other Words or Phrases; also without any Manner of Influence or Consequence drawn from those Words, though it lye never so plain and open. *Without Explication* signifies, where the Person proposing himself to Communion assents to the Words of Scripture, but refuses to explain in what Sense he understands those Words; and neither will own nor deny any other Articles or Propositions that may be offered him as Terms of Communion, though deduced from the Words of Scripture with never so much Evidence; nor will confess his Faith, even in the most important and necessary Points, in any other Words but those of his Bible,

When I mention *Knowledge sufficient for Christian Communion*, it is not to be understood, as if Knowledge were the only Thing necessary; for in order to Christian Communion, there is also required a professed Subjection to all the known Duties of Christianity, and a Conversation answerable to this Profession: But the present Inquiry is, whether the express Words of Scripture are a sufficient Test of that Knowledge,

ledge, which is one Requisite to Communion.

Now let the Question be proposed in the fullest and fairest Manner thus. *Whether a Persons professing to believe the English Bible itself, or subscribing, assenting to, or repeating any Form of Words expressly taken out of any English Translation, without any Manner of Explication or Inference, can be an Evidence of Christian Knowledge, sufficient to demand Admission to the Lord's Supper, with a Christian Church in England?*

Those that assert the *Affirmative* in this Question, are of two Sorts; either Persons that have entertained some Sentiments in the important Points of Christianity different from the common Faith of the Churches, and would shelter those Opinions under the express Words of Scripture, though they explain them in their own Sense; or they are Persons that heartily maintain the common Faith, but through an unlimited Excess of Charity are afraid of narrowing the Terms of *Christian Communion*, lest they should exclude some sincere Christians out of the Church; they are jealous of losing their Christian Liberty, and are afraid of having Conscience oppressed by an Imposition of any *Confessions of Faith*, or *Articles of Communion*, drawn up in the Words of fallible Men.

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Those that hold the *Negative* in this Question are also of two Sorts ; either such as have a narrow and uncharitable Spirit, and refuse their Communion to all Christians that will not assent, consent, or subscribe to every Word and Expression contained in their Articles, Confessions and human Forms ; or they are such as maintain a just and reasonable Charity towards all that they can hope to be sincere Christians, and dare not exclude any Persons duly qualified from the holy Communion : They would also secure Christian Liberty in the full Extent that *Christ* has given it to his People ; but they are zealous for the *Faith once delivered to the Saints*, for the Purity of the Gospel, for the Honour of *Christ* in his Churches, and the true Profit and Pleasure of Christian Communion in holy Ordinances ; nor would they willingly indulge such an excessive *Complaisance* instead of *Charity*, and such a licentious Freedom of Opinions in their Community, as would tend to the Destruction of all that is valuable in the Communion of the Churches of *Christ*.

I must confess myself at present to stand on the *negative* Side, and I hope I may rank myself among the latter Sort of them. I cannot yet persuade myself that a mere Assent to the Words of Scripture, without any Explication, is a sufficient Rule by which Churches should judge of their Communi-

cants Knowledge; and the *Reasons* that influence and constrain me to be of this Mind, I shall lay down at large in the following Sections; yet I shall endeavour to shew in the End of my Discourse, how a just Liberty may be secured, both to single Christians and to Churches, and the sacred Bonds of Charity maintained, without a licentious Indulgence of all sort of Heresies and Errors in the same Church.

SECT. II. *The First Argument* against the Confinement of Churches, to the express Words of Scripture in judging of the Knowledge of their Communicants, is this, *that the greatest and best End that has ever been aimed at in this Method, can never be attained by it.* The greatest and best Design of it is to secure Christians from all Imposition of human Forms, and from making Confessions of Faith drawn up in the Words of fallible Men, a *Test of Knowledge* in the Things of God: But this Method is no effectual Security; for since the inspired Words of *Greek* and *Hebrew* can be no Test of Knowledge in *English* Churches, a Confession must be made in Words of *English*: Now all *English* Words, into which the Scripture is, or may be translated, are the Words of fallible Men; and no Person can be infallibly sure in some difficult and controverted Texts, that  
they



they do fully and truly express the Sense of the sacred Originals.

I grant here that for private Christians to search their *English Bibles*, and find the Matters of their Salvation, there is abundantly sufficient Certainty of the Truth of every *Translation* in general, that it clearly declares all that is of such Importance: Because whatsoever is necessary to Salvation, is sufficiently contained and revealed, not in one or two, but in various Texts of Scripture, though perhaps not always in express Words; and in most of these Texts learned Men generally agree about the mere Translation of them: This need create no Manner of Scruple to sincere and humble Christians in their own Knowledge, Faith and Practice. The *English Bible* is gloriously sufficient for the Salvation of every humble Christian in *England*. The *English Gospel* has saved many Thousands, without any Skill or Knowledge of other Languages.

But in this controverted Case, when Men assert that a Confession of express Words of Scripture shall be sufficient to purge any Man from the Charge of *Heresy*, or give him a Right to demand *Christian Communion*, even where his Opinions are justly suspected, I must take Notice here that some of these controverted and difficult Texts may naturally come into Question; such as those which seem to favour any *Heresies*, and those  
which

which seem to guard against them. Now in such a Case as this, the mere *translating* of the Words oftentimes determines the *Sense* of them: The Translation of such a Text is a Sort of Interpretation of the Meaning of it; and then, What Translation of any particular Text, shall be the *Standard of Orthodoxy* for all our Churches? Shall that which is publick and established by the Magistrate have this Honour? But who gave it this Authority over all the Churches? Man or God? Shall any private Translation of learned and pious Men met in Council, determine the Sense for all Communions? But whence had they this Power? Much less can the Translation of any single Person be a publick Standard.

Wandering over all Nations and Churches, and surveying all the various Pretences to such a Power, I cannot find where to fix the Sole of my Foot, but on the *only Protestant Principle*, (viz.) *That as each Person with Regard to his own Conduct in sacred Things, must judge of the Sense of Scripture for himself, using the best Helps of Translators and Expositors that he can obtain; so each Community using the same Helps, must judge for themselves of the Sense of the Word of God, with Regard to their Conduct in admitting Persons to partake of sacred Ordinances among them.* Therefore that particular Church whose Communion is desired, must determine

mine whether any human Words, in which a Person's Faith is confessed, are *Orthodox* in their Sense, or no; whether they do truly answer the End of such a Confession, or no; and include the necessary Articles of the Christian Faith; and whether they give sufficient Evidence of a Man's Knowledge in Christianity, in order to admit him to their Communion.

Suppose a modern *Socinian*, or a more orthodox Man, should refuse the common *English* Translation of the first Chapter of St. *John's* Gospel, and confess his Faith in Words of his own Translation thus. *In the Beginning was Reason, and Reason was with God, and Reason was God*: Suppose an *Athanasian* refuses the *English* Translation of Rev. iii. 14. where *Christ* is called *the Beginning of the Creation of God*, and says, ἀρχὴ ought to be translated the *Head of God's Creation*, lest *Christ* be represented as a Creature, and he will put this Text into his Confession of Faith. Suppose an *Arian*, an *Antinomian*, an *Anthropomorphite*, a *Pelagian*, a *Calvinist*, each confess their Faith in Words of Scripture of their own Translation; none of these *English* Words, are in the strictest and properest Sense, the Words of God, but the Words of fallible Men; and the particular Church whose Communion is sought must necessarily interpose with their own Sense of Scripture, according to the

the best Advantages they have: They must interpose, I say, so far as to judge, whether any of these Persons have so interpreted those controverted Texts, in which each chuses to confess his Faith, as to express aright what they believe to be the necessary Articles of Christianity; and though there be no Necessity, that a Church and all its Members should agree in the Sense of every Text, yet there must be finally such a Sense of some Scriptures, given or assented to by the Person desiring Communion, as may satisfy that Church that he has Knowledge sufficient for it. Now this may be done without an *Imposition of any set human Forms of Words*, as I have shewn before.

SECT. III. *My second Argument* is this.

To make a mere Confession of express Words of Scripture a sufficient Test of Knowledge to demand Christian Communion, denies that Liberty to some Christians, which it indulges to others; nay, it denies the same Liberty to a *whole Community of Christians*, or to their Ministers, which it indulges to *each Catechumen*, or to every single Person that offers himself to their Communion. I make it appear thus.

Each single Person that offers himself to Communion with a particular Church, has Liberty given him by this Rule, *to put his own Sense* on the Commands of *Christ* in demand-



demanding of Communion ; but the Ministers or Members of this Church, are not allowed this Liberty *to put their own Sense* on the Commands of *Christ* about receiving him. Perhaps they know by Discourse and Conversation, that this Person denies some Articles of the Christian Faith which they think necessary, while he confesses the Words of Scripture, and abuses them to a pernicious Sense ; yet he has Liberty to impose himself on their Communion, because he thinks he is fit for it in his own Sense of Scripture ; but they cannot, according to this Rule reject him, though in their Sense of Scripture they think him unfit.

According to his own Interpretation of the Bible, he says, he owns all the fundamental Articles : According to their Interpretation, they say, he denies some of them ; yet this Test opens the Door of Admission to him, whensoever he demands Entrance, and does not permit them to shut it.

They believe the Scripture forbids them to receive such to *Christian Fellowship*, who have not received the *Christian Faith*, yet this Rule allows them not to forbid him their *Fellowship*, though they think he denies the *Faith* in some necessary Parts of it. They think, according to their Sense of the Word of God, that he has no appearing Right to the Kingdom of Heaven, and consequently that he has no Right to enter into  
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the Church or Kingdom of *Christ* on Earth; but according to this Rule they are bound to admit him, even contrary to their own Sentiments and Consciences. He has Liberty to demand, but they have none to refuse.

This seems to me like a Restraint of the Liberty of a Multitude of professed Christians, to secure or indulge the Liberty of a Catechumen, which is far from impartial Justice, in the very Nature of Things. Now certainly *Christ* would never impose such a Rule of Communion on his Churches, which should not be reconcileable to common Justice, and to that great and general Rule of his, *Do to others as you would have others do to you.*

SECT. IV. My *Third Argument* is this: That a Child, an Ideot, or a very ignorant Man, may repeat any short Form of Confession, drawn up in the expresse Words of Scripture, and say, he believes it; or he may subscribe or assent to any longer Form, even the whole Bible itself: But surely a Child, an Ideot, or an ignorant Person who have not a real Knowledge and Understanding of the Things of Christianity, are not fit to be received into a Christian Church, nor admitted to the Lord's Supper. There is no formal Repetition of a few Words by Memory, can give any Proof of Christian Knowledge in the Heart; no Assent or Subscription

scription to a Book, as big as the Bible, can make it evident that a Man understands five Lines of it: Yet if this be the proper Test, such ignorant Creatures must be received to the noblest and highest Ordinance of *Christ* upon Earth.

Suppose a poor Wretch that wants Bread, and knows almost nothing of Christianity, hears that such a Congregation maintain their Poor well, and in order to secure a good Maintenance, he gets a few Scripture-Expressions on the most important Points without Book; his Life has been obscure, unknown, and (so far as appears) not any Way scandalous; he proposes himself to Communion with this Church, he repeats the Creed, or (if he be desired to make a larger Confession) he takes up his Bible and says, *I believe every Word that is contained between these two Leathern Covers to be true; and I resolve to live according to it.* This poor Wretch may demand Admission according to such Principles.

If you say, there must be some Inquiry made, whether he understands the Words of Scripture, or no, then there must be some determined Sense put upon those Words of Scripture as proposed by the Church, or as assented to by the Communicant; and thereby you depart from your pretended Rule, that *the express Words of Scripture are a sufficient Test of Knowledge.*

I grant,

I grant, that after the utmost Search and Inquiry into Christian Profession, and Piety of Conversation, some Hypocrites will creep into the best-ordered and purest Churches; human Affairs are so constituted: We cannot know the Hearts of Men: Tares and Wheat must grow together till Harvest: But it is sufficiently plain in Scripture, that they ought not to admit those to Christian Communion, who understand not the first Principles of Christianity; and therefore we ought to seek some satisfactory Evidence of a Thing that may so easily be found, (*viz.*) *Christian Knowledge*, and not bind ourselves to such a Rule of Admission as can give no Evidence, whether a Communicant has Christian Knowledge, or no.

I might add under this Argument also, that as a *Child*, an *Idiot*, or a Person ignorant, or a Heathen may claim Communion according to this Rule; so a *Child* or a *Heathen* is a sufficient Judge who has Knowledge enough to be admitted to the Fellowship of a Church of *Christ*; for a *Child*, or a *Heathen*, can tell whether the Person proposing himself, subscribes his Bible, or no; whether he declares his general Assent to all the Scripture, or no; or whether he repeats any express Words of Scripture aright, or no. As there is no Need of any real Understanding in Communicants upon this Principle, so there is no Need of any Judgement or Prudence



dence in the Churches of *Christ*, in order to receive them: No Need of Elders or Governors, Men of Wisdom and Discretion to use the Keys of the Church, where the Door is so wide, that half the Children in a Parish may go into the Church at once; and it opens so easily, that a Child or a Fool can manage it

SECT. V. *A fourth Argument* against this Test of Communion is this. If a mere Assent to the express Words of Scripture be a sufficient Test of Christian Knowledge to claim Admission into a Church, this opens the Door for an endless Variety of different and contrary Opinions, and Practices, to enter into the same Church; Multitudes of *Heresies*, that relate both to Faith and Practice, may swarm in the same Communion; Truths and Errors, fundamental, and not fundamental, will be mingled here; Errors tolerable, and intolerable; extremely dangerous, if not damnable and destructive, will be admitted: For all that profess them in our Age and Day, in Protestant Nations, will subscribe to the Bible as the sufficient Rule of Faith and Practice; nay, all Persons that are not *Heathens*, *Deists*, *Jews* or *Mahometans*, may claim a Place in the Churches of *Christ*.

Now let us *first* recount some of those *various Doctrines* that will hereby be encouraged

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raged in the same Communion, and *then* consider what will be the *Inconveniencies* attending such a mixed Community.

*First*, Let us recount the various Doctrines and their Professors, that will be encouraged in the same Communion by this Rule.

1. The *Anthropomorphites* say, that God hath proper Parts, Hands and Feet, and Eyes, and Ears, and is really in the Shape of a Man, according to the express Words of Scripture taken in a plain literal Sense. One of this Opinion (as I am informed) lately proposed himself to Christian Communion.

2. The *Allegorists*, on the other Hand, explain in a *metaphorical* and *figurative* Sense, whatsoever Expressions they find in Scripture, whose literal Sense does not agree with their Notions. Upon this Principle some that deny the proper Sacrifice and Satisfaction of *Christ* say, that his Atonement, Redemption and Sacrifice, are but figurative Expressions. Others believe Salvation to be obtained only through *Jesus Christ*, but they mean *Christ*, or the *Light* within them.

3. The *Arians* say, that *Jesus Christ* was a mere Creature, made out of nothing, before all other Creatures, and superior to Angels, endued with divine Power, and called  
God,

God, and that he assumed Flesh without a human Soul.

4. The *Sabellians* believe, that the blessed Trinity, the Father, Son, and holy Spirit, doth by no Means intend three proper distinct Persons, but is a mere Trinity of Names and Manifestations, Modes and Relations in the Godhead or divine Nature, and that the Son of God was not properly a Person before his Incarnation.

5. The *Socinians* derived from the old *Samosatenians* and *Photinians* say, that there is no such Trinity of Persons in the divine Nature, as the *Athanasians*, and the *Schoolmen* maintain. That *Jesus Christ* is a mere Man, and had no Being before he was conceived of the blessed Virgin. That *Christ* did not make any proper Satisfaction for the Sins of Men. That the Soul sleeps with the Body, and rises with it at the Resurrection; and after all, they acknowledge that the Light of Nature is sufficient to direct Men to eternal Happiness, and that nothing is to be believed in the sublimest Points of Religion, but what is to be understood and judged of by our Reason.

6. *Enthusiasts*, on the other Hand, believe that Reason is of no Use in Things of Religion. That human Learning doth more Hurt than Good among Christians. That there is no Need at all of it for Ministers of the Gospel. That our own Labour for our

Salvation signifies nothing, and therefore they wait for sensible Impressions of the holy Spirit, to move them to the common Duties of Christianity.

7. The *Pelagians* say, that there is no imputed or inherent original Sin. That Man after his Fall, had a proper Power and free Will in himself to become truly pious, or grossly wicked; and to do either good or evil. That Men may obtain the Favour of God by the Merit of their own good Works.

8. *Arminians*, or *Remonstrants*, generally hold, that there is no certain and absolute Election or Redemption of particular Persons unto Salvation, that there is no Need of the Almighty, Sovereign, and efficacious Influences of the Spirit, in order to Conversion. That Believers may fall and perish eternally; and that there is no certain Perseverance of the Saints.

9. The *Antinomians* hold, that all true Believers were justified from Eternity. That an elect Person is never chargeable with Sin before God. That the moral Law of God is not of perpetual Obligation to the Consciences of Believers. That Sin can do a Believer no real Injury.

10. The strict *Calvinists* deny every single Proposition, and peculiar Sentiment, that I have here mentioned under all the foregoing Heads, and call them all *Errors*; and believe



believe the contrary Propositions to be *divine Truths* delivered in the Scriptures.

I might here add a Variety of Doctrines and Sects, that have in former Ages troubled and divided the Church, (*viz.*) the *Eutychians*, who supposed that the two Natures of *Christ* were so united and blended together, that the Human was lost in the Divine. The *Apollinarians*, who taught that *Christ* brought his Flesh from Heaven, and that he had no human Will, but only a divine Will. The *Donatists*, who required the true Church to be without Sin or Spot. The *Origenists*, who deny the eternal Punishment of Sinners, and fancy the Devils themselves shall at last be saved.

I might further reckon up a long Train of wild and unaccountable Opinions which have no settled Name, yet all arise from various Senses, that the Lusts, or the Fancies, or Humours, or Mistakes of Men, have put on the express Words of Scripture: But these are sufficient in this Place.

I would not be understood here to intend that every Person, to whom any of these Names may be affixed by Men, believes or professes all the Doctrines that are ranged under any of these Heads: All that I mean by this Catalogue is this, that under these several Names in our general and common Discourse, all these Principles or Proposi-

tions are usually comprehended and understood.

Note, I have not mentioned the *Papists*, because they allow not the Bible to be a perfect Rule, but build Part of their Religion on human Traditions, and the pretended infallible Authority of their Church.

But so many of all those Sects of Christians that I have mentioned, as are found in our Day, do all take the Bible for their perfect Rule of Faith and Practice, and each of them will subscribe the whole Bible, at least in their own Translation of it, and profess to believe all the express Words of Scripture: Now if any Confession of express Words of Scripture, be a sufficient Test of Christian Faith, all these Persons have this Qualification, and cannot be denied Christian Communion in any Church to which they propose themselves, for want of true Christian Knowledge.

And now I would ask, what a wretched Sort of Communion is it, that could be maintained in such a Church, of such widely different Opinions? What Fellowship could they have in hearing the same Sermons, in joining in the same Prayers, and in all sacred Offices? What holy Harmony, what Order, what Peace or Christian Unity, can be carried on in such a mixed and disagreeing Multitude? But I insist no longer on this at present.

SECT. VI. In the Prosecution of the *fourth Argument*, I come therefore in the next Place to consider, what will be the *Inconveniencies* of making such a large and wide Door to the Church, and of encouraging such a promiscuous Communion: For though all these can never walk and worship together in any Peace or Order, yet all may be admitted on this Foundation.

One great *Inconvenience* is this, (*viz.*) Some Persons that deny necessary fundamental Truths and Duties, without which a Man cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, may enter into a Church on Earth, and claim Christian Communion by this Rule of Admission: For it may perhaps be doubted, whether all necessary particular Articles, as well as general ones, are found in express Words in the Bible (which I shall afterwards have Occasion to enquire into.) But if all necessary Articles were found there expressly, yet the *grossest Hereticks* may consent to those Expressions, and explain them only in a *metaphorical* Sense: So the *Socinians* explain the Expressions of Scripture concerning the Sacrifice and Atonement of *Christ*, and make them all mere Metaphors, to signify something of a much inferior Nature: But be their Explications, and their Sense of Scripture what it will, yet they may demand Christian Communion upon this Principle,

ciple, that they subscribe the Bible, and every Expression in it; though they explain the fundamental and essential Articles of it quite away by Figures and Metaphors.

Indeed this has been the *Practice of Hereticks* in all Ages to run to this Refuge, and make the Words of Scripture their hiding Place and Defence; having learnt well from their subtile Teachers, or their own cunning Devices, to twist and turn the Words of Scripture by Figures, and Tropes, and Distinctions, into their own pernicious Sense; and this ever will be the Practice of Persons, grossly erroneous in the Things of Religion, that yet would appear to agree with the Scripture, and hold the Christian Faith.

They may tell you that *Christ is their only Hope of Salvation*, and their Way to God the Father; but they mean a *Christ within*, or the Remains of the Light of Reason, and the Dictates of a natural Conscience.

They may assure you, *they believe the Resurrection of Christ from the dead*; but they mean nothing but *Christ within them*, in the rising or awaking of the Conscience from stupid and inactive Silence.

They may assent that *Christ is God*, but mean only a *metaphorical God*, because he is made a King, or Governor of the Church.

They may profess the whole Scripture in their own Sense, and in the mean Time they



they may believe such Contradictions as these, (*viz.*)

I believe; *God worketh all Things after the Counsel of his own Will*, Ephes. i. 11. Yet I believe, that the Decrees of God are nothing else but immutable Fate, and the necessary Connection of second Causes, as Mr. *Hobbs*.

I believe that *God knoweth all his Works from the Beginning*, Acts xv. 18. Yet I believe, this Foreknowledge is nothing else but a perfect Sagacity of Mind, and immediate Contrivance to turn all Things that happen to fulfil his own Designs, as effectually as if he really foreknew. So a much better Man than Mr. *Hobbs* has explained it.

I believe, that *in the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was God*, John i. 1. Yet I believe that *Jesus Christ* had no Being before he was conceived, and born of the Virgin, and that truly and properly he is but a mere Man.

I believe, that we must *flee Fornication*, 1 Cor. vi. 18. but I believe, that nothing else is intended in all such Texts but *spiritual Fornication*, which is *Idolatry*.

I believe, that we must *keep ourselves from Idols*, and not practise Idolatry, 1 John v. ult. Yet I believe that we may worship the true God, by Idols or Images; for the Idolatry which is forbidden in the Scripture, signifies only the Worship of Stones, and Stocks, and Images, for real and true Gods.

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I believe we are bound to *follow Peace with all Men.* Heb. xii. 14. yet I believe we may contend for the Faith so earnestly, as to burn Hereticks.

I believe we must *follow Holiness* too, *without which no Man shall see the Lord.* Heb. xii. 14. yet I am persuaded Sin can do no real Hurt to a Believer.

Now who is there that has any Value for the Honour of the Gospel, for the Glory of *Christ*, for the Purity of our Religion, and the Welfare of the Church, that would establish such a Test of Communion, by which all these sort of Persons may claim Admission? A Church composed of such a Variety of Sects, that differ so widely in Points so numerous and so important, would much more resemble *the Ark of Noah*, with all Manner of Creatures in it, clean and unclean, than the *Fold of Christ*, where none but his Sheep should have Admittance, or such as have the visible Marks of his Sheep upon them.

The other *Incongruities, Inconveniencies, and Mischiefs* that will necessarily attend a Church, founded upon this Test of Admission, shall be more largely and particularly described in my *Answer* to the next *Question*, to which I refer the Reader.

Perhaps it will be said by Way of Reply to all these *Arguments*, that *Where any Person professes his Faith in the mere Words of Scripture,*

*Scripture, and yet makes it appear that he understands them in such an erroneous Sense, as is inconsistent with the Gospel of Christ, or the Fundamentals of Christianity, such a Person ought not to be admitted to Christian Communion, because he plainly overthrows by his Explication, what he asserts by his Confession: But where he gives no Explication at all, it should be presumed that he believes all necessary Truth.*

To this I answer, I. That if a Confession of Faith, in the mere Words of Scripture, be a sufficient Test for Church-Fellowship, no Man who professes those Words ought to be excluded, let him explain them how he please; for if the Rule of Scripture does indeed require you to receive all that profess the Faith in scriptural Words, no particular and perverse Explications whatsoever should break in upon this sacred Rule, least hereby, you who exclude him, set yourself up as a Judge of the Sense of Scripture for other Folks, and instead of making the *Words of Scripture* your Test, you make *your own Sense of it* the Test of Communion, which is the very Thing you pretend to avoid, and which you profess to renounce.

II. I add further, If you allow that a *perverse or Antichristian Exposition of Scripture in fundamental Points*, may exclude a Man who professes the Words of Scripture from the Communion, then a *just and reasonable*

*sonable Suspicion* of any Person's *Antichristian Exposition* of it, may give just Ground for Enquiry into his Sense of it, before he be received to a Christian Church; even as a *just and reasonable Suspicion* of any Man's *Immorality*, gives just Ground for a stricter Enquiry into his Morals; for if he hath not *Christian Faith*, he is no more fit for the Christian Communion, than one who hath not *Christian Practice*.

Now suppose a Person be a *mere Stranger* to you in *his moral Life*, you ought to make Enquiry concerning his *Morality* before you receive him, and not take his *Virtue* for granted: And by the same Reason, if he be a *mere Stranger* to you in *his Faith*, you ought to make the same Enquiry concerning his *Sense of Scripture*, in order to know that he is not an Heretick, or that he does not profess scriptural Words in an heretical Sense; and not always take it for granted, that he believes the Scripture in its true Sense.

Thus these two Parts of the Test of Communion, (viz.) *Profession of the true Faith*, and a *pious Practice*, will stand upon the same Foot; and a Man may be excluded even by your own Concession, if he wants either of them, even though he profess the Words of Scripture. And there ought to be an explicit Discovery of both these by the Candidate in order to Christian Communion, and not merely an implicit Belief of them



them in those who are appointed to examine him.

As I grant with you, that where a Person has in general a fair moral Character among those who know him, we ought not to take up and indulge *groundless and unreasonable Suspicions of his Vertué*; so where a Person, who appears to be sincere and pious, makes Profession of his Faith in more general Language, we ought not to take up *unreasonable and groundless Suspicions that he is an Heretick*. But as in Times of universal and spreading Corruption of Manners, there should be a more strict Enquiry into the Conversation of every Communicant, so in Times of spreading Error, where Scripture Words are frequently used in an heretical Sense, there ought to be a more strict Enquiry into his Faith; and it is a very reasonable Demand, that he should explain his particular Sense of the general Words of Scripture in fundamental Points, and tell what he means by them, that he may not cover *gross Heresies and Antichristian Opinions*, under the Confession and Disguise of *scriptural Language*, that so *Antichristians* may not be received into a *Christian Church*.

SECT. VII. The *last Argument* I shall propose against making a Confession of the express Words of Scripture a sufficient Evidence of Christian Knowledge is this, *that*  
*the*

*the Scripture itself does not directly, and in express Words, contain all that Knowledge of particular Truths and Duties that is necessary to Christian Communion. I say of particular Truths and Duties, for I own it contains all in Generals.*

Under the *Seventh Question*, I have made it appear evidently, that the Knowledge necessary to Christian Communion, includes in it, both *a Knowledge of all those Things that are necessary to Salvation*, and *a Knowledge of all those Things that are necessary to practise, and enjoy this Communion.*

Now if we first survey all those Truths and Duties that are *necessary to Salvation*, perhaps we might find particular Articles, either of Faith or Practice, that are not set down in most express Language in the very Words of Scripture. I grant, they are all so expressed in general Terms, that a mean Understanding, and a slight and easy Turn of Thought, is sufficient to derive from Scripture all the Particulars that are necessary to Salvation; every needful Explication, or Consequence, lies plain and open to the View of common Reason, though it may not be directly expressed in the very Letter of Scripture.

But I chuse rather to survey those *Things that are necessary to Practice, and to enjoy Christian Communion*; such Knowledge as is needful, in order to partake of the Lord's Supper in a regular Manner in the Christian Church:

Church: And these Things are not all contained in exprefs Words of Scripture, but require something of Explication and Consequence to make them appear. As for Instance.

1. If *Baptism* be necessary before the Lord's Supper, it is necessary also to know the *Nature and Design of Baptism*, the Meaning of being baptized in the *Name of the Father, Son, and Spirit*; and the *Manner* of performing it, whether it must be done by dipping or sprinkling, or whether both be not lawful; and whether *Baptism in Infancy* be sufficient. Now all these are not written down in exprefs Words of Scripture.

2. It is necessary also that a Person should know what is the *Nature of the Lord's Supper*; what the *Bread and Wine* represent; what is the Design of *bleffing, breaking, and distributing* them; who are the *Persons* that must do this: And a *Woman* must know, whether *Women are to be admitted* to the Lord's Supper; all which Things are not fully and exprefly delivered in the very Words of Scripture.

3. That *several Persons*, who make a credible Profession of Christianity, *must agree to meet together*, in order to celebrate Christian Worship, and partake of this Ordinance; and that it is not to be received alone, because it is an Ordinance of Communion.

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I might instance in other Things that are *necessary Attendants* on these Ordinances, considered as *human Actions*, which the Light of Nature plainly dictates, and which may be drawn by the most obvious and natural Consequences from the Directions, or Examples of Scripture; but they are not found there in express Words, nor indeed is there any Need of it, since they lie so open to the weakest Exercise of Reason.

Now *to sum up the last Argument*. If there be any Articles of Christian Belief, or Practice, necessary to Salvation, or to publick Christian Worship, and to a regular Participation of the Lord's Supper, which are not laid down and described in the express Words of Scripture, then may we not conclude, that a mere Declaration of the Belief of the Bible, or any Part of it, is not a certain Evidence of Knowledge sufficient to demand Christian Communion, where all Explications and Consequences are utterly refused?

SECT. VIII. The great *Objection* against all my Discourse is this; that *since the Word of God is a sufficient and perfect Rule to direct Christians in their Faith and Practice, the Words of Scripture are therefore a sufficient and perfect Test of Christian Knowledge*. The Scripture (say they) is certainly capable of itself to determine all our Doctrines, and all  
our



our Duties; it is sufficient *to furnish the Man of God perfectly unto all good Works, and it is able to make every Man wise unto Salvation.* It was given for this End *by the Inspiration of God*; and it does not stand in Need of the Assistance of human Inferences and Explanations, in Things necessary for Christians to believe and practise. 2 *Tim.* iii. 15, &c. Therefore an Acknowledgement of the Scripture, or the most considerable Articles of Christianity in the express Words of it, is a sufficient Test for Christian Communion.

This *Argument* is very popular, and drawn out into much flowry Eloquence, to persuade and captivate the unwary. The Writers on this Side of the Question brighten and flash upon the Reader, and, as it were, overwhelm him (if the Eye of his Judgment be weak) with such dazzling Language as this. “ What are not the *Words*,  
 “ which *God* himself hath written, effectual for all the Purposes of Christianity,  
 “ without the Addition of the *Words* of  
 “ *Men*? Is not *God* wiser than *Man*?  
 “ And can any *Man* form for himself a better Test of Knowledge, than *God* has  
 “ done? Did not *Christ*, and his Spirit,  
 “ which spoke by the Apostles, know how  
 “ to express divine Truths in the best Manner, and in Words fittest for every Use  
 “ and Service of the Christian Church?

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“ Has

“ Has our Lord *Jefus Chrift* fo little con-  
 “ fulted the Truth and Security of his Gof-  
 “ pel, as well as the Peace and Welfare of  
 “ his Churches, as not to exprefs every  
 “ Matter neceffary to Communion, in plain  
 “ Language? Can we, fhall we, dare we  
 “ indulge fo unbecoming an Opinion of the  
 “ Care of our bleffed Lord? Can there be  
 “ any other Words neceffary to exprefs his  
 “ Doctrines by, than thofe which himfelf  
 “ has chofen?” Thus the Torrent of fuch  
 a popular Harangue drowns all Distinctions  
 of Things, and carries away the Affent be-  
 fore due Confideration.

To all this Flourish, *I anfwer firft by Way*  
*of Conceffion*; That our bleffed Lord is All-  
 wife, and has the tendereft Care of his  
 Church, in providing a fufficiency of Helps  
 for every Occafion. The holy Scripture is  
 compleat, and fufficient of itfelf to teach us  
 all Things neceffary; and the Inftuctions  
 of it are clear, plain and evident to every  
 humble Inquirer: There is no Need of any  
 Additions of Men to this perfect Rule, nor  
 are any Words that Men can invent fitter to  
 exprefs thofe Doctrines and Duties, more  
 fuitably to the Occafion and Purpofe for  
 which each Part of Scripture was written, I  
 am abundantly perfwaded, that from the  
 Book of God every plain Chriftian may ea-  
 fily collect his own Duty in the neceffary  
 Affairs of his Salvation, and every Man may  
 obtain

obtain Knowledge enough to fit him for the Communion of a Christian Church.

SECT. IX. But to give a *full and direct Answer* to the Force of the foregoing *Objection*, I would lay down these *Considerations*, which may help to remove those glaring Rays of Rhetorick that diffuse themselves round the Argument, impose upon, and dazzle weaker Minds, and prevent them from beholding the Question in its true Light, which, if once seen in its proper Sense, would be determined with much Ease.

1<sup>st</sup> *Consideration*. It is generally agreed by Protestant Writers, that not the mere Words of Scripture, but the Sense of it is properly *Scripture*. The Words are but the Shell in which the divine Ideas are conveyed to the Mind. It is not the Words of the Bible, but the Sense of it, which has the proper Characters of the *Word of God*. If any Words or Language might pretend to this, surely it must be the *Hebrew and Greek Originals*: Now these have no such Power upon an unlearned Dane, or Swede, a French or an English Man, as is attributed in Scripture to the Word of God. These Words in Greek would not *pierce or divide in sunder the Soul and Spirit* of a Barbarian: The Gospel in mixed Syriac Language, in which Christ

himself spoke, would never prove *the Power of God to the Salvation* of a Roman, or a Turk: Nor could the *perfect Law of the Lord*, in Hebrew, convert the Soul of a Muscovite. But when these Original Words are translated into each Language, and convey the same divine Instruction and Sense to different Nations; this Sense and Instruction (which is properly the Word of God) work upon the Heart, and make a new Creature; for the Sense of Scripture is the same in all Languages, though the Words are very different. Hence it is plain, that we do not in the least derogate from the Honour of the Bible, while we declare, that it is the *Sense of Scripture*, and not the *mere Words* of it, that must be our Rule of Duty and Practice.

2d Consideration. That the *mere Words* of Scripture were never given us for a *Test of Truth and Error*, but the *Sense* of Scripture is such a Test; much less can we suppose the *Words of Scripture* given us for a *Test of every Man's Knowledge*, in order to Christian Communion. Those that are of this Opinion, profess indeed to pay a most exalted and superlative Honour to the holy Scripture, in making the very Letters and Syllables of it so effectual and powerful, to determine all Controversies in the Christian Church with the greatest Ease, and to charm and subdue the warring Tongues of Men to

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Submission and Silence : For if an Heretick acknowledges these Letters and Syllables to be divine, no Man must open his Mouth against him. But surely this is such an Honour, as God never designed for Letters and Syllables ; and if I might venture to use so hard a Word, I should ask whether it were not a superstitious Regard paid to Ink and Paper ? When Errors are proposed, we are indeed called to examine them by *the Law and the Testimony*, Isaiah viii. 20. and it is said, *if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no Light in them.* But the Design of this Text is not to make the very Words and Syllables the Judges of Truth, but the Meaning and Sense of them : I prove it thus.

Suppose I doubt whether *Christ made a real and proper Satisfaction to the Justice of God for the Offences of Man* ; I compare this with the Words of Scripture, and I find there, that *Christ redeemed us from the Curse, he bare our Sins on his Body, he was made a Sacrifice for Sin, he is our Propitiation, or Atonement* ; but I cannot find the Words *real and proper Satisfaction in Scripture* ; how then must I judge whether this be Truth, or no ? I cannot do it by the mere Words, for these are different ; but by its Agreement in Sense and Meaning with those other scriptural Expressions, I find it to be a divine Truth.

I prove it by another Instance thus, Suppose I am told, that *I must subdue my Pride and Vanity of Mind*, and that *I must repent of all Backbiting and Intemperance*, of which *I have been guilty*, if ever I would be saved: I consult my Bible, and there I find that I *must repent of Sin*, that I *must mortify the Deeds of the Body*, that I *must crucify the Flesh with its Lusts*, that I *must pluck out my right Eye, and cut off my right Hand*, if I would *enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*. Now how shall I know what is my Duty? Surely, the *literal Sense* of the Words cannot be. How then shall I find my Duty, but by explaining the *spiritual Sense* of these Metaphors, in which Scripture so much abounds? A *right Hand*, and a *right Eye*, signifies those *Sins which are beloved as those Members of the Body*; and then I must draw such Consequences as these, (viz.) *If Sin must be repented of, then Backbiting and Intemperance must be repented of, for they are Sins; and Pride and Vanity of Mind must be subdued for the same Reason.*

If the Words of Scripture may not be treated in this Manner, and applied to solve any Doubt or Difficulty by Explications and Inferences, the Scripture cannot be a sufficient Test of Truth and Error; and if this Method be allowed, then it becomes also a sufficient Test of Christian Knowledge in  
order

order to Communion; which is all that I contend for.

3d *Consideration.* Most of the Books of Scripture were written at different Times, and upon very different Occasions, to reprove some particular Vices, to refute some special Errors or Heresies, to instruct in some particular Affairs relating to Doctrine and Duty, in such Expressions as were most exactly suited, and divinely proper to answer those special Designs. The Metaphors and Figures of Speech there used were well known, or well explained, in that Age, and accommodated to the Genius and Understanding of those Persons, for whose Benefit they were first written: And by these divine Writings we have sufficient Direction to find out all necessary Truths and Duties at all Times, in all Nations, and Ages of the Church, by Comparison of Things, and just Inferences. Now though God foreknew what Errors would arise in every Age, yet it is impossible that so small a Book as the New Testament, could mention and refute every Error that might possibly arise, or forbid every particular Vice or Corruption that might spring up in following Ages; and all this in express Words, and in Terms most directly opposing those Sins and Errors which are almost infinite, and as yet had no Being. Therefore without any Derogation from the Sufficiency of Scripture, we may

justly allow, that it is possible for wise and pious Men, that live in those succeeding Ages, to explain the general Sense of Scripture in such Expressions, as may more directly and effectually guard against the Sins and Heresies of the Age; this is certainly needful in order to instruct the Ignorant; and some Confession of this Kind may be proper and necessary in Times of Error, to keep the Communion of the Churches of *Christ* pure and holy; yet this also may be done, as I have shewn before, without an express Imposition of any *Set human Forms*; but it can never be done effectually by making the mere Words of Scripture a Test of Communion, which in all Ages *Hereticks* have learnt to pervert to their own *Sense*.

4th *Consideration*. The Sufficiency of Scripture, for our Rule of Faith and Practice in revealed Religion, does not signify a Sufficiency of the bare Words and Syllables of Scripture, to declare every particular Article of Doctrine or Duty in direct and express Terms: But that it sufficiently includes and contains them all; so that by a most easy and obvious Exercise of Reason, all necessary Truths and Duties may be found, either in *express Words*, or in easy, *plain and natural Consequences*; and that there is no Need of old Traditions, nor any new Inventions of Men. The Sufficiency of *natural Light*, to direct innocent Man in *natural Religion*,



*Religion*, does not signify that all the general and particular Articles of it were written actually, and constantly abiding in the Mind, but that they are plainly and easily deducible by natural Reason. So a *Book* is said to be sufficient to teach any *Art or Science*, if it contains all the main Principles of it, so that all the Parts of this Art or Science, may be very easily learnt thereby.

The *New Testament* is sufficient to teach us the holy *Skill of Prayer*, because it includes every Thing necessary for that Duty; and the *Lord's Prayer* has been generally esteemed a perfect Model for that Part of Worship; yet a Child may say over all the Words of the Lord's Prayer, and know not at all how to *pray*: And if it were possible for a strong Memory to repeat all the New Testament by Heart, it would not be a sufficient Proof, that that Person was acquainted with the divine *Skill of Praying*. So the *Bible* is abundantly sufficient to *furnish a Preacher* for his Work; but if he could say never so many of the Words of the Bible without Book, it would not be a proper Test of his Ability to *preach*. This spiritual Furniture and Skill for the Performance of *Praying or Preaching*, is to be obtained by comparing several Parts of the Bible together, by learning their Sense and Meaning, and by drawing proper Inferences from several Passages of it, and knowing how to ap-  
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ply them to all particular Cases in Sermons and Prayers : The same may be said in Proportion concerning the Furniture and Fitness of a Person to be admitted to Christian Communion. Now in Order for a Man to manifest that he has this spiritual Skill and Furniture, he must acquaint me in some other Words, what he means by these Words of Scripture that he can repeat by Memory.

It is not at all inconsistent with the Clearness and Perfection of Scripture, that the unlearned should use their Reason in finding out Doctrines and Duties, by comparing Scripture with Scripture, and drawing general Inferences from the Practice, Example and occasional Speeches of *Christ* and his Apostles ; as it has never been counted inconsistent with the Clearness and Perfection of it, that learned Men must translate the *Greek* and *Hebrew* into our *Mother-Tongue* : For the Bible in *Greek* and *Hebrew*, is more insufficient to lead a poor *English* Man to Heaven without Translation, than an *English* Bible is to lead him thither, without the Exercise of his Reason in Explications and Inferences.

The *plain and natural Consequences of Scripture*, have in a larger Sense been often called Scripture itself ; and have always been justly allowed as sufficient to determine any Controversy in Religion, or prove any Truth,

or

or refute any Error. The Example of *Christ* and his Apostles, shew us the Use and the Necessity of Consequences; they argued in this Manner against their Opponents, who did not acknowledge their divine Commission. *Chillingworth* himself (in that famous Paragraph of his which is so often cited) acknowledges that plain *Inferences* from Scripture make up Part of our Religion: *The Bible*, (saith he with Emphasis) *The Bible is the Religion of Protestants; whatsoever else they believe besides it, and the plain irrefragable indubitable Consequences of it, well may they hold it as a Matter of Opinion, but not as a Matter of Faith and Religion.*

Nor is it necessary to the Plainness, Evidence and Strength of any *Consequences of Scripture*, that all Persons should own them, and none deny them; for the plainest and most open Truths have been denied by some Persons in all Ages, through Want of Attention, through false Education, through the Prepossession of other Opinions, through the Attachment to a Party, through Obstinacy of Temper, and blind Zeal: But all the *Consequences of Scripture*, that are necessary to Faith and Practice in order to Salvation, are so plain, that an honest, sincere and diligent Person, though weak in Understanding, may easily find them out by Reading, Meditation, humble Prayer, and  
Readiness

Readiness to receive the Truth in the Love of it.

Here let it be noted, that the necessary Consequences of Scripture, may be called the Doctrine of Scripture; though the Consequences of the Doctrines of *Luther*, *Calvin*, or any other Man, may not be called their Doctrines; because the Spirit of God, who *searcheth the deep Things of God*, well knew all the Propositions and Consequences that ever could be drawn, and fairly deduced from the Words of Scripture, when he first inspired the sacred Writers; and therefore he designed them all as certain and divine Truths. But it is not so with Men, who may hold such Opinions as are attended with unhappy Consequences, which yet they themselves may not be aware of, or perhaps may expressly deny.

*5th Consideration.* The most perfect Rule always needs a proper Application to every particular Case; and this does not at all diminish its Perfection, nor lessen its Perspicuity. *Scripture* is still the perfect and final Judge of Truth and Duty in Things sacred, though every Man must apply the Words and Sense of Scripture to his own Case, for his own Instruction, Edification, and Salvation; and every Church, for their own Practice of Communion, must apply the Words of Scripture according to their own best Judgement. *The Law* is a perfect Judge



Judge of Right and Wrong in Things Civil, though it must be applied, by the Reason and Wisdom of Man, to particular Cases. A Rule, or Square, is not imperfect because it requires the Hand of the Builder to apply it, in order to measure the House, or the Wall. We are not Brutes that cannot reason, nor mere white Paper, fit to take nothing but the express Stamp of Letters and Syllables; Reasoning is one of our noblest Powers, and God demands its Exercise: We are bid to search the Scriptures, and compare spiritual Things with spiritual. It is impossible to transfer, or apply, any general Sentence of Scripture to particular Exhortations, Reproofs, Instruction, Conviction, or Comfort for ourselves or others, without deducing *Consequences*, and thereby bringing the general Words to our daily present Occasions: Nor is it possible for any Persons to be admitted into a Church of *Christ*, upon just and regular Grounds, without comparing their personal Characters, their Confessions, and their Practice with the Word of God, by the Exercise of our Reason, and applying to that particular Case, what we derive and infer from general Rules, or parallel Examples; now all this cannot be done without making Use of the *Consequences of Scripture*.

6th Consideration. This Test of Christian Knowledge, this supposed Rule of Communion,

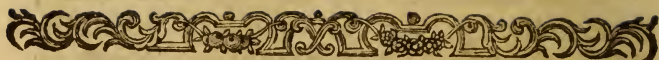
munion, is not found among the express  
 Words of Scripture. I might therefore ask  
 Leave of our *Protestant* Brethren, who stren-  
 uously maintain this Principle, to make an  
 Address to them, in their own Language,  
 thus: “ Surely if this Rule of Christian  
 “ Communion be of such absolute Necessi-  
 “ ty to maintain Peace, and secure Truth,  
 “ we may wonder why it is not written  
 “ down expressly in Scripture. Has *Jesus*  
 “ *Christ* so little consulted the Peace of his  
 “ Churches, and the Truth of his Gospel,  
 “ as to neglect so necessary a Rule of  
 “ Church Communion, without which you  
 “ suppose, that neither Peace nor Truth  
 “ can be maintained? O what a World of  
 “ Strife and Confusion in the Churches  
 “ might have been prevented, by an ex-  
 “ press Appointment of the Words of  
 “ Scripture, to be the universal Test of  
 “ Knowledge for Christian Communion?  
 “ Is the Scripture so careful to express all  
 “ Things necessary, and yet is this omit-  
 “ ted? May I not thence infer, according  
 “ to your own Principles, that this Rule  
 “ of Communion is not necessary? Indeed,  
 “ in my Opinion, it is so far from being  
 “ written in the Bible in express Words,  
 “ that by all the Exercise of my Reason, I  
 “ cannot derive it from my Bible, by any  
 “ plain or certain Consequence; I have not  
 “ yet seen Evidence enough to believe it  
 “ to

Qu. X.      *a sufficient Profession?*      255

“ to be a sufficient, or an appointed Rule ;  
“ much less of so absolute Necessi-  
“ ty to Christian Communion, Truth or  
“ Peace”.



QUESTION



## QUESTION XI.

*Whether all Sorts of Protestants may join together as Members of the same Church?*

### SECTION I.



Y the Name *Protestant*, I intend not only those that protested against the Corruptions of the *Roman Church*, and the Edict of the Emperor in *Germany* at the Beginning of the Reformation, but I conclude also all that hold the same general Principle, making the Bible the only and perfect Rule of Faith and Manners, and giving every single Person a Right to judge for himself concerning the Sense and Meaning of the Bible in Matters of Religion, and to practise according to his own Sentiments in Things sacred.

Now if the Question be put, *Whether all such Persons professing the same Protestant Principle with all their different Sentiments, may be united in the same Church*, I answer,  
(1.) It



(1.) It is impossible, and they cannot. (2.) It is unlawful, and they ought not. (3.) If it were both possible and lawful, yet it is highly inexpedient, and therefore it should not be done.

First, *It is impossible, and they cannot join in the same Communion.* There are some Actions necessary in order to Christian Communion in Worship, which are appointed in *General* in the holy Scripture, but must be performed in *some particular* and determinate Way: Now this in the very Nature of Things makes it necessary to determine the Words of Scripture to a particular Sense; and different Sects of *Protestants* determine these Words in such different Ways, as will often be exceeding hard, and sometimes utterly impossible, to be reconciled and made consistent in one Communion: As for Instance,

1. Some cannot in Conscience attend upon the Ministry of a Person, who has not been ordained by the Imposition of the Hands of a *Diocesan Bishop*, for they think him no Minister of *Christ*; others refuse him for a Minister, who has not had the Hands of several *Presbyters* imposed in his Ordination; and there are a third Sort again, that think either of these two Ordinations to be unnecessary, if not unlawful; and believe him no Minister of *Christ*, unless he be chosen by a *Congregation*, and set apart to that Work amongst them by Fasting and Prayer.

*Note*, that I speak here of those that are each of them strict and rigid in the Extremes of their own Way, honest and sincere in the Main, but zealous and obstinate in their own Principles; now these can never join under one Ministry, unless their Minister has passed through all these three Sorts of Ordinations, which is not to be expected.

2. Some think it utterly unlawful to pray in Publick, *without a Form*, lest *rash and hasty Expressions* be *uttered before God*, Eccles. v. 2. Others think it equally unlawful to *use a Form of Prayer*, lest they *quench the Spirit* which is given to teach them to pray, 1 *Thess.* v. 19. *Eph.* vi. 18. and how can these possibly join in the same Prayer?

3. Some esteem the *Lord's Prayer* so glorious, so perfect, and so universal a Prayer for all Times and Ages, that it should never be omitted in publick Worship; others fancy it unlawful to be used at all as a Prayer, ever since the Spirit was given to Men at the Ascension of *Christ*, because it is in their Sense a Confinement of the Spirit to a Form of Words.

4. Some think the Practice of *Singing* the Praises of God, to be a *necessary Part* of *Christian Worship*, and cannot persuade themselves to live without it; others esteem it a mere *Antichristian Invention*, and they dare

dare not be present for a Moment in an Assembly that sings, lest they give Countenance to false Worship and Superstition; and if any other *Musick* be joined to the Voice, they count it still more heinous and abominable.

5. Some believe the *Lord's Supper* cannot be celebrated aright *at Noon*, because it was instituted *in the Evening*, and is called a *Supper*; others that live scattered at great Distances in a wide Country Parish, can never meet to communicate in an *Evening*, especially four or five Months in the Winter; and they think the *Lord's Supper at Noon* is a very lawful and proper Practice, and necessary to them, because otherwise they cannot attend it.

6. Some suppose, that it is very irreverent and unlawful to communicate in a *sitting* Posture, and think it their Duty to *kneel*, when they receive the Seal of the greatest of Blessings from the Hands of God; others think no other Posture of Body lawful besides *sitting*, because it is a Feast, and was instituted with the proper Gestures at a Table; and many Foreign Protestants esteem *Sitting* to have too much Familiarity and Irreverence, and *Kneeling* too much like Adoration of the Bread, and therefore always *stand* at that Ordinance. And here we may suppose some narrow-spirited Christians, of each Sort, that dare not be present at the Sa-

crament, where a different Gesture is used, lest they seem to encourage a sinful Practice by their communicating together.

7. Some are persuaded, that none have a Right to the Communion that were not *baptized by Dipping*, and that upon a Profession of their Faith, for they count all the rest unbaptized; and these can never join at the *Lord's Supper*, with a Minister or People that were only *baptized in Infancy by Sprinkling*, and think that sufficient.

8 Some are satisfied that there is no *Holy-Day* in the Week but *Saturday*, or the *Seventh*, and they require publick Worship and the Communion on that Day; others think the *first Day* of the Week is alone *holy*, and they demand the Celebration of the Lord's Supper on that Day constantly; nor can they leave all the common Business of Life to attend on the Worship of *Saturday*.

Now every Man sees how *impracticable* it is to bring these different Sorts of *Protestants* to the settled Communion of the same Church. I confess I have represented their different Sentiments in their Extremes, and in the highest Degrees of Opposition; but it must be granted also, that several such Sort of Christians are to be found, whose weaker Judgements and warm Zeal, have carried these Matters to the same Extremes of Opposition in which I have represented them; there-



therefore my Argument stands good, and such a *promiscuous Communion* appears *impossible*.

Yet here I would lay down this *Caution*; that though *these Sorts of Protestants* are necessarily excluded from mutual Communion, it is not because either of them are *unworthy* of it, or because it is *unlawful* to communicate with each other, but merely because their *different and contrary* Forms of Worship render it impossible. Let them not therefore censure or judge one another, but so far as true Piety appears, let them account each other good Christians, and be ready to do all proper Christian Offices for, and toward each other; and let them wait till God shall convince either of them of their excessive Rigour, and unreasonable Strictness, in their particular Opinions, and in the mean Time let them be heartily willing to join with each other in such Parts of Worship in which they agree, where just Occasions may require it.

Secondly, if the Thing were possible, and such a mingled Communion of all professed Protestants *could be* practised, yet there are some Cases wherein it would be *unlawful, and ought not to be practised*: For several Persons may believe the Bible to be the only and perfect Rule of Faith and Duty, and yet may put such a Sense upon it, as is either dishonourable, dangerous, or destruc-

tive of the *Christian Faith*; I have made this appear at large under the foregoing Question; there I have shewn that there may be *Anthropomorphite* and *Arian* Protestants, *Sabellian*, *Socinian*, and *Pelagian*; *Rational*, and *Enthusiastick*; *Literal*, and *Allegorical*; *Calvinist*, *Arminian*, and *Antinomian*; there I have largely proved, that Persons professing the Bible, may deny the *Divinity and Satisfaction of Christ*, the real *Resurrection of Christ*, the *Operations of the holy Spirit*, the *final Resurrection of the Body*, and several other such important Doctrines, by turning the Expressions of Scripture to a mere *allegorical* and *figurative Sense*: Now as a certain Author says, “ If a Man use the Words  
 “ of Scripture, but impose a very different  
 “ and *new Sense* upon them, he may there-  
 “ by as well bring in a *new Gospel*, as if he  
 “ used Words of his own; and so he sub-  
 “ jects himself justly to the *Anathema*, or  
 “ Curse of the Apostle. Gal. i. 8, 9. *As*  
 “ *we said before, so say I now again, if any*  
 “ *Man preach any other Gospel unto you than*  
 “ *that ye have received, let him be accursed.*”  
 It is a very just and remarkable Saying to this Purpose of Doctor *Reynolds*, in Conference with *Hart*: “ He who believes the  
 “ Words of *Christ*, in the Sense of *Anti-*  
 “ *christ*, and rejects the Sense of *Christ*, and  
 “ his Spirit, is not a *Christian*, but is, in  
 “ Deed and Truth, *Antichristian.*” Now  
 with

with such Sort of Persons, Christian Communion ought not to be maintained, for they who deny the Christian Faith, can have no Right to the special Ordinances of *Christ*.

Thirdly, If such a promiscuous Communion of all professing Protestants were both possible and lawful, *yet it is highly inexpedient*. Now the Apostle has determined it, that *Things which are utterly inexpedient*, and such as hinder the *Edification* of the Church, should not be practised, 1 Cor. x. 2, 3.

The great and evident *Inexpediency*, and the many *Inconveniencies* of such a Community, will appear under the following Heads.

SECT. II. *Ist Inconvenience*. What a most uncomfortable Communion would Christians have among Brethren and Sisters, in the same Community of such wild and distant Principles, as those ten Differences of Christians I have reckoned up under the former Question? Read over all their Opinions again, and say, How utterly inexpedient is it that these should be united in one Church! *What Fellowship has Righteousness with Unrighteousness? And what Communion has Light with Darknes? And what Concord has Christ with Belial, or what Part hath he that believeth with an Infidel? And what Agreement hath the Temple of God with Idols?*

2 Cor. vi. 14, 15, 16. For he that disbelieves any necessary Articles of the Christian Faith, we may rank him among the Infidels.

Christian Communion, in the Pleasure and Profit of it, consists very much in an Union of Hearts in constant publick Worship, in praying occasionally with one another, and conferring together about divine Things: But what Bonds of Charity can unite their Hearts, where one justly suspects the others Faith in Points of greatest Importance? How can they join with Pleasure in hearing the same Word of God, while their Sense and Meaning under those Words is so extremely different, and contrary to each other, as Light and Darknes, as God and the Creature, as Heaven and Earth? What Pleasure in joyning to address the same Saviour, while one believes him to be the true and eternal God, the other thinks him but a mere Man? What Harmony is there in their Joys and Praises, while one adores this Redeemer for bearing the Punishment of all his Sins, and dying as a Sacrifice in his Stead; and the other, by the same Expressions of Adoration, only gives him Thanks for confirming his Doctrine of Remission of Sins by becoming a Martyr for it? What Delight can the Members of the same Church take in conversing with each other, who differ so widely even in Things  
of



of experimental and practical Godliness? While one is relating the Power and Freedom of divine Grace in convincing him of Sin, and shining into his Heart to give him the saving Knowledge of the Gospel, in turning his Mind from Earth to Heaven, and changing his whole Soul, with all the Powers of it, into a divine Temper, in securing him from this and that Temptation, and over-ruling his Spirit to persevere in the Paths of Holiness; the other believes that divine Grace and Power has no Hand in all this, but what is only providential, by external Means and Helps; and that this Piety is really to be ascribed to the Freedom of his own Will; and perhaps a third Person shall interpose, and say in *Antinomian* Language, “ There is no Need you should be  
 “ so solicitous about these lesser Matters of  
 “ Freedom from Temptation, or the Mor-  
 “ tification of Sin, either by divine Grace,  
 “ or by your own Will; if you are but a  
 “ Believer in *Christ*, and your Faith be  
 “ strong, Sin cannot do you Hurt, and you  
 “ shall certainly be saved.” What wretched  
 Communion in Prayer, or holy Conference,  
 must be maintained among Fellow-Mem-  
 bers of the same Church, whose Opinions  
 are so fearfully divided?

SECT. III. *IId Inconvenience.* What an  
 unhappy Station must a Minister have a-  
 mongst

mongst such a People? How difficult to fulfil his Ministrations of Prayer and Preaching without Offence? Or rather how impossible? Surely the Work of a Preacher is to explain the Scripture to his Hearers; but he can hardly step out beyond the very express Words of Scripture, but he breaks in upon some of their darling Sentiments: He can scarce comment upon any Text, but he opposes the one Side or the other of two contrary Opinions, and grieves some of the Flock: He can hardly speak of the Person of *Christ Jesus* the Mediator, but he offends the *Arian*, the *Samosatænian*, or *Athanasian*: He can scarce express any Thing about the Redemption and Atonement of *Christ*, but he awakens either the *Calvinist*, or the *Socinian*, to Jealousy, and affronts their sacred Doctrines: He must not ascribe Glory to the Father, Son and Spirit, lest he displease the *Unitarians* in his Assembly; nor must he neglect it, lest the *Trinitarian* take Umbrage. He dares not name the Word *Perserverance*, lest the *Arminian* be angry; and if he should talk of *falling from Grace*, the *Calvinist* trembles, and half despairs.

And as Preaching would be rendered almost impracticable, unless he confined himself only to mere moral Duties, such as *Seneca* might preach; so all his Ministrations in Prayer and Thanksgiving would be most unhappily perplexed and confined: He must

not

not pray for Forgiveness of Sins, for the *Antinomian Believer* does not want it; nor for Almighty sanctifying Grace, for the *Remonstrant Christian* knows no Need of it: He must not confess original Sin, for the *Pelagian* disowns himself guilty.; nor dares he mention a Word of the imputed Righteousness of *Christ*, or Justification by Faith alone, lest half the Assembly rise in Arms against him: Nor must he venture to give Thanks for the free electing Love of God, least two Thirds of his Church shew a murmuring Dissent. Surely there is little left for this Man to talk of in his Pulpit, but what he may borrow from *Plato*, *Plutarch*, or *Epicætetus*.

SECT. IV. To prevent this *Inconvenience*, the Patrons of this Opinion assert, *That a Minister ought not to impose any particular Sense on any of the controverted Scriptures in his preaching*; but all his Business is freely and fairly to acquaint the People with those various Senses of Scripture, in which the different Sects of Christianity have contrived to explain it: He must represent the Reasons impartially on both Sides, and leave them to the Judgement of the Hearers, *without biasing of them* (as one expresses it) *by the needless Declaration of his own Opinion*: And they tell us, *It would be much more edifying to all Christians, if Ministers in their publick*

*publick Discourses expressly asserted no other Things than such as all, who read the Scripture and receive it for the Rule of their Faith, acknowledge to be certain.*

*To this I reply.* Ist, What poor Food would this be for hungry and thirsty Souls to be treated with nothing else in a Christian Church, but the mere Inculcation of moral Duties, or the Narration of Christian Controversies? What Support could a weary and heavy laden Sinner, bowed down and broken with a Sense of Guilt, obtain from such a Discourse? Must a poor perishing Creature, under the Fears of the Wrath of God, have no Relief given it from a just and full Explication of the Sacrifice of *Christ*, because the *Socinian* does not believe it? And must a weak Christian, conflicting long with Sins and Temptations, have no Encouragement from the Doctrine of inward effectual Grace, lest the *Arminian* take Offence at it? Is this that Way of preaching that *Christ* has ordained to save guilty and impotent Creatures, by a deep Silence of the true and only Relief, or a mere dubious Proposal of it?

2dly. Besides, how can a Minister answer it to God, or his own Conscience, if he sees Errors in Matters of Importance growing amongst Men, perhaps in his own Church too, and does not attempt to prevent



vent or refute them by his best Interpretation of the Word of God? Is he not *set for the Defence and Confirmation of the Gospel*, 1 Phil. vii. 17. is he not bound to maintain *sound Doctrine*, and to *teach no other*. 1 Tim. i. 3. Must not he *contend earnestly for the Faith once delivered to the Saints?* Jude 3. How narrow is the Work of a Gospel Minister, and how much less useful is his Labour or his Office, if he be forbid this Service to *Christ*, and the Church?

There were some little Points of Controversy, in the Apostles Days, about the *Lawfulness of Meats*, &c. which if they were never determined, would not be destructive to Christianity; concerning these, the Apostle at some Seasons directs to *keep our Faith*, or Opinion, *to ourselves*: Rom. xiv. 22. Yet at other Times he bids *Timothy* preach his own Sense of them, and declare for Christian Liberty, and the free Use of Food. 1 Tim. iv. 6. *If thou put the Brethren in Mind of these Things, thou shalt be a good Minister of Jesus Christ*, &c. Now can we think that *Timothy* should publicly give his Sense in such circumstantial Things, and yet not give it in the most important Matters of the *Satisfaction and Atonement of Christ*, and the Doctrines of the *efficacious sanctifying Grace of the Spirit*? Read 2 Tim. ii. 14, 15, 18, 23, &c. Tit. i. 9, 10,

10, 13. and ii. 1, 2. and judge if the Apostle requires, or even indulges those young Preachers to propose important Doctrines in such a doubtful Way, as may *minister Questions, and gender Strifes*; and in such an indifferent Manner, as though it was no Matter which Opinion his Hearers embraced: Surely this would be the Way to keep Men *ever learning, and never coming* to a settled *Knowledge of the Truth*.

3dly. I might add in the *third* Place, how can it be supposed, that every Minister who has determined his own Sentiments in these controverted Points, should represent the different Senses of Scripture in just and impartial Language, so as not to favour either Side? Will not his own Opinion give a Warmth of Delivery, or a Brightness of Expression, while he is representing the Reasons of it? And will he not be tempted with a cold and languid Faintness, to propose the Arguments of those that differ from him? It is utterly as *unreasonable* to expect such an unbiassed Indifferency in his Explications of the important Points in the Word of God, as it is *unrighteous* to require it.

4thly. In the *last* Place I reply, that such a Practice as this would kindle Contentions instead of quenching them: It would raise perpetual Strife in the Church, instead of composing it; and by relating the Opinions and Arguments on all Sides, would furnish  
every

every warm Temper with Weapons offensive and defensive, to carry on the controversial War, and fight it out at home. This Thought naturally leads me to mention the third *Inconvenience*, of forming such a mixed and motley Church.

SECT. V. III<sup>d</sup> *Inconvenience*. This sort of Communion would be much more likely to tear itself to Pieces by perpetual Jangles, Disputes and Quarrels, than to maintain Peace and Unity. Nor could this pretended Bond of Peace, *an Agreement in express Words of Scripture*, secure it. Our Saviour has already given a fair Decision of this Matter, when he assures us, that *a House divided against itself can never stand*, Matt. xii. 25. These Persons that entertain so different Opinions in Religion, might agree well enough in the common Affairs of Life, if they were not joined in one Church, and by that Means brought constantly to worship together; but when they must hear continually the same Sermons, attend the same Prayers, and offer Thanks to God together in the same Words, with different Meanings, it is not possible to secure them from awakening their jarring and contrary Sentiments, whensoever any Thing relating to those Subjects is mentioned; and it is most likely too it will rouse their Anger, their Contempt and their uncharitable Censures of those

those that differ from them in Points of Importance. Thus the proposed *Band of Peace* would become a *Firebrand of perpetual War*, till it ended in Divisions and Desolation.

And this Event may justly and reasonably be expected upon the Election of every new Officer in the Church, as often as Death, or Removal of Communion, or Incapacity, &c. give Occasion for a new Choice. Will not each Party be zealous to elect a Person of their own Sentiments? And the Church by this Means be crumbled into many Parties, and divided amongst many Candidates? Thus the Passions of Men will have a strong Temptation to exert themselves in Wrath and Reproaches; nor can any of them be perswaded to yield and drop their own Candidates, which might be much more easily done, if the Competitors were of the same Opinion.

SECT. VI. IVth *Inconvenience*. Such a Principle or Test of Communion, might in some few Years quite change the Ministers and Ministrations, the whole Scheme and Order of a Church of *Christ*, from moderate *Calvinist* or *Lutheran*, to *Antinomian*, *Pelagian*, or *Socinian*, from *Christian Worshipers* to *Antickristian Idolaters*, and from a *Temple of God* to a *Synagogue of Satan*; and according to this Rule, the Church has no Power, nor Right, to prevent it. Suppose a Church of pious *Lutherans*, or *Calvinists*, consisting  
of



of thirty or forty Members, whereof but eleven or twelve are Men; if providentially six or seven of these dye in a few Years, and six or seven bold *Antinomians*, or *Socinians*, are admitted on the mere Profession of Scripture: They become the Majority, and consequently the Rulers of the whole Church; they chuse Pastors, and appoint Ministrations and Orders according to their own Sense of Scripture; what must all the twenty or thirty original Members of the Church do, that walked and worshipped many Years together in Holiness and Comfort, according to the Doctrine and Practice of *Luther*, or *Calvin*? Must this lesser Party of Men, and perhaps almost all the Women of the Church, sit still under such Preaching, and such Ministrations, as an *Antinomian*, or a *Socinian* Pastor would entertain them with, to their weekly publick Sorrow, and their mourning in Secret every Day? Or must they quietly depart from the Communion of the Church, and each of them seek their better Edification in new Churches where they could find it?

Perhaps also this Church might be possessed of many temporal Advantages, they might have a fair and well-built Place of Worship belonging to the Community, with Gifts or Annuities for the Support of

the Ministry and the Poor ; Plate and Linen, and other Utenfils for the Celebration of holy Ordinances given to the Church : Must seven or eight professed *Antinomians*, or *Socinians*, by this Means become the Possessors of it ? And the old Members, while they seek their better Edification, relinquish their first Society and Place of Worship, and all these temporal Possessions at once, which were given for the sacred Uses of that *Calvinist* or *Lutheran* Church ? And yet they have their own Poor to maintain still, who cannot find their Edification in the *Socinian*, or *Antinomian* Worship ? Can that be a necessary Rule of Church-Communion, which would thus injure the greatest Part of the Church (including the Women) and rob them all of their spiritual Profit, and their outward Advantages at once ?

The Tables may be turned, and the same Inconveniencies would arise to a *Socinian*, or *Antinomian* Church, by admitting *Calvinists*, or *Lutherans*.

Now if such a Sort of mixed Communion be impracticable, unlawful, and highly inexpedient, as I think it is plainly proved beyond Contradiction, the *Question* must be determined on the *Negative* Side, and *all Sorts of Protestants cannot be Members of one particular Church*.

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A very natural Question arises here, *Whether no Christians must join in Communion, but those that are in all Things of the same Opinion?* This shall be the Subject of my next Enquiry.





## QUESTION XII.

*Whether no Christians must join in the same Communion, but those that are in all Things of the same Opinion?*

### SECTION I.



HOPE there is nothing that I have said in the foregoing Discourses can be interpreted into so narrow a Sense, as to exclude all Protestants from the same Communion, but those whose Sentiments are exactly alike. This would make all Communion impracticable; for it will be hard to find two Persons in the World, that in every Point of Religion have the same Sentiments: Or if here and there half a Dozen, or half a Score Christians were found that came very near to each other in Opinion, these must every where set up distinct Societies by themselves; thus the Church of  
*Christ*



*Christ* would be crumbled into endless Divisions.

To this *Question* therefore I *answer* in the *first* Place, That as the Affairs of the Christian World are found in this imperfect State, it seems generally most adviseable for every Person to join in *constant and fixed Communion* with such a Church, or be admitted Members of such a particular Christian Society, whose publick Profession comes nearest to his own Sentiments, where he can possibly have Opportunity to do it; this would lay a Foundation for the greatest Union and Peace among the Members of the same Church; considering the Folly and Weakness of human Nature, and how much our Differences of Opinion endanger our Charity, certainly this would be the easiest and surest Method of answering the Design of those Apostolical Directions and Wishes.

Rom. xv. 5, 6. *God grant you to be like minded, that ye may with one Mind, and one Mouth, glorify God, &c.* 1 Cor. i. 10. *I beseech you, Brethren, by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same Thing, and that there be no Divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same Mind, and in the same Judgement.*

And in order to shew their general and extensive Charity, they may take proper Opportunities for *occasional Communion* with other Churches that differ from them in

Matters of less Importance ; and they should be as ready to admit the Members of such Churches to the same Privilege of *occasional Communion* with themselves. Thus they might maintain the *Unity* of the Church of *Christ* in General, and preserve *Peace*, both abroad and at home, without Contention or Schism.

SECT. II. But to declare my Opinion particularly on this Head ; I would say, that there are *two* Sorts of Persons that ought never to communicate in the same Sacraments ; and there are *three* Sorts of Christians that need not join as Members of the same Church, yet may occasionally maintain Communion with each other ; and I think *all other* Sorts of Protestants may hold constant Communion together.

The Persons that should never attempt to join in the same Communion, either constant or occasional, are these.

1st. Those that differ in fundamental Articles of Doctrine or Practice, or such Articles, as either Side supposes to be fundamental and necessary to Salvation ; for if they can never hope to meet together in Heaven upon the Principles they profess, I see no Reason why they should join in solemn Acts of special Communion on Earth ; nor does the holy Scripture require or encourage,

courage, but rather forbids it. *What Communion hath Light with Darknes? Righteousness with Unrighteousness? The Temple of God with Idols? And he that believeth with an Infidel?* 2 Cor. vi. 14, &c.

2dly. Those that are so widely divided in their Opinions about some practical Points of Worship or Discipline, which are necessary to be practised in Communicating together, but are utterly inconsistent with each other: Several such I have mentioned in the beginning of the former Question; as, those that think publick Liturgies or Singing of Psalms necessary, and those that think them utterly unlawful: Such as esteem *Episcopal* Ordination of absolute Necessity, and such as believe it to be sinful and Antichristian, &c. These cannot hold Communion together in special Worship, and hardly in the general Ordinances of it.

The Persons that should content themselves with *occasional Communion* together, are chiefly such as these, (*viz.*)

1st. Those that give Evidence of serious Piety, but differ in very *important* Points of Doctrine, which yet they cannot certainly call *fundamental*; and especially such Points as continually occur in Preaching, Praying, or other Parts of Worship, and would frequently disquiet and disturb the Devotion of one Party, or the other. Such I may suppose the better Sort of *Remonstrants*, or *Ar-*

280      *May different Opinions*      Qu. XII.  
*minians*, compared with the *Calvinists*, and  
the better Sort of *Enthusiasts*, or *Antino-*  
*mians*.

2dly. Those that differ much in the external Forms of Worship or Discipline, which yet are not utterly inconsistent with each other ; but if fixed and united in one single Community, they might probably occasion frequent Disturbances ; such are the moderate *Episcopalians*, and *Baptists*, *Lutherans*, and *Calvinists*, &c.

Those I call *moderate*, who are not so strict and rigid in their Opinions, nor run into such Extremes, nor place so great a Necessity in their particular Modes of Worship or Discipline, but being Persons of serious Piety and of extensive Charity, they think it proper to omit or alter, on particular Occasions, what may be offensive to either Side ; or at least they allow either Side their own particular Practices and Forms. These may very well unite in *occasional Communion*, though they are fixed Members of the Churches of their own Persuasion. A Church that communicates kneeling, may allow Communion to one that stands or sits: A Church baptized in Infancy, or in adult Age, may allow Communion to those that are of the contrary Practice in Baptism. A Church that receives Members upon a stricter Profession of inward and experimental Godliness, may allow Communion to one  
that



that has been admitted a Member of another Church, where the Profession of Christianity is more large and general. A Church that holds no bodily Presence of *Christ* in the Sacrament, may allow Communion with one that believes *Consubstantiation*, or that the Body of *Christ* is present together with the Bread, &c. Such occasional Instances of Communion might tend to enlarge the Spirits of Men into a good Opinion of each other, and increase Christian Charity. But if the Want of Opportunity to join with Christians of their own Sentiments, should call or encourage them to unite as fixed Members of the same Community, they should agree to some Sort of *Articles of Peace*, not to disturb the quiet of that Church, by breaking in upon and overturning its old and usual Forms of Ministration and Government: For the Peace of the Church is more valuable than the Amendment of some improper Forms, where the Life and Power of Godliness is preserved.

3dly. Those that differ in less Points of Christianity, but are of unsettled and unfociable Principles or Humours, and cannot content themselves without shifting from Church to Church, nor be easy with any that differ from them, without a zealous Propagation of their own Opinions, contrary to the Rules that the Apostle has given for the Peace of the Church, *Rom. xiv.*  
Some

Some learned Writers suppose these to be the *Hereticks* in the Scripture Sense. Surely these should be contented with occasional Communion, and they should give satisfactory Evidence of inward Piety, before they are received to any Communion at all.

Now if these three Sorts are admitted occasionally to communicate in the special Ordinances of *Christ*, this seems to me sufficient to answer the Canons of the Apostle, where we are bid *to receive such as Christ has received*, and that *without doubtful Disputations*. Rom. xv. 7, 8. and Rom. xiv. 1. Whereas if they should be admitted to a full and fixed Membership, Power and Privilege in the same Church, without any Limitation by Articles of Peace, that would so much endanger the common Edification and Peace of the whole Body, as to run counter to other Canons of the same Apostle; *Let all Things be done to Edification*. 1 Cor. xiv. 26. *Follow the Things that make for Peace*. Rom. xiv. 19.

As for *all other Protestants*, whose Differences are of less Moment, notwithstanding they may be very various, and almost infinite, yet if they are of a peaceful Spirit, and give Evidence of hearty and sincere Piety, I think they may join, where they have Opportunity, as compleat and constant Members of the same Church, and worship the same *God* together, through the same Lord  
*Jesus*

*Jesus Christ*, by the same *Spirit*, and fulfil all Duties of Christian Fellowship, to his Glory, and their mutual Edification.

When any such Sort of Difficulties happen in Relation to the Communion of Christians, which cannot be determined by the plain Reason and Nature of Things, and *concerning which we have received no certain Commandment from the Lord*, the wisest Man on Earth can go no farther than to say with the Apostle, *I give my Judgement as one that hath obtained Mercy of the Lord to be faithful; I suppose therefore that it is good for the present Case to act in this or that Manner*, 1 Cor. vii. 25, 26. If such a Modesty of Language became that great Man *St. Paul*, surely every lesser Minister, or Christian, would transgress the Bounds of Decency, to assume more to himself.

SECT. III. An Illustration on the three last Questions.

What I have advanced on these Subjects may receive some Light perhaps, and may prevail more toward the Conviction of my Readers by an *Illustration* of these Cases, by a parallel Instance taken from a *Society of Philosophers*: For when the same Case is put in new Subjects of another Kind, it does not meet with the same predetermined Judgment,

ment, as in Subjects that have been long controverted.

Suppose several *Stoick Philosophers* join in a Society, and have weekly Lectures read to them, by one or more Professors whom they have chosen, and once a Month hold a Feast, wherein some peculiar Ceremonies are performed to the Honour of *Zeno*, the Master and Founder of their Sect. Every Person that is admitted to communicate in their Feast, must profess himself a *Stoick Philosopher*, a Follower of *Zeno*, and to receive the Precepts of *Zeno* for his Principles of Doctrine and Practice; and he ought to give Satisfaction by Conference to the Members or Professors of this *Stoical* Society, that he owns *Zeno's* Precepts, and that in such a Sense; as is sufficient, in their Judgment, to make him a good *Stoick*.

Now if any one shall mingle some of the Doctrines of *Epicurus* therewith, or expound *Zeno* so as to make *Happiness consist in sensual Pleasures*, this overthrows the *Stoical* Doctrine, which makes *Happiness to consist in Wisdom and Virtue*; and such a one cannot be admitted to any Communion with them in their Festivals, *constant or occasional*.

But if any Person shall mingle much of *Platonism*, or *Pythagorean* Philosophy with the *Stoick*, and expound *Zeno*, in some Part of his Doctrine, in the Sense of *Plato*, or  
*Pytha-*



*Pythagoras*, perhaps he may be invited and admitted as a Guest at the *Stoical* Feast, and so hold *occasional Communion* with them; because he is truly a *Stoick*, though a Favourer of other Sects. His Notions are not ruinous and destructive to the most valuable Principles of *Stoical* Philosophy; though he differs so much, that it would endanger that particular *Stoical* Society, if this Person were received as a stated Member to all the Powers and Privileges thereof.

But as for others who hold the *Stoical* Doctrine, tho' one expounds it according to *Epiſtetus*, another believes it in the Exposition of *Antoninus*, another in the Exposition of *Seneca*, who were all *Stoicks*, these may all be admitted to constant Communion, and as Members of the same Society; for the great Ends and Designs of their Society are hereby promoted and secured; their several Differences are but small, and very consistent with the Cultivation of *Stoicism*, and the Benefits of the Society.

*In short*, those who hold so little of *Zeno's* Precepts, in the Sense of the Society, as neither to be consistent with its *Being*, nor *Well-being*, must be excluded from all Communion with it; such are *Epicurus* and *Democritus*, even though they should subscribe all the Words of *Zeno*.

Those who hold no more of *Zeno's* Precepts in the Sense of the Society, than is just  
consistent

consistent with the *Being* of the Society, but may naturally prove fatal and ruinous to the *Well-being* of it, should be admitted only to occasional Communion ; such are those who admire *Plato* and *Pythagoras*, and mix their Directions with the Doctrine of *Stoicism*.

Those who hold so much of *Zeno's* Precepts in the Sense of the *Stoical* Society, as to be consistent with the *Being*, *Well-being*, and *Edification* of the Society, may be admitted as fixed Members thereof, and be entitled to all its Powers and Privileges ; such are the Followers of *Epicetus*, *Seneca*, &c.

I hope such Sort of parallel Instances may give some Light and Direction in these Affairs of Communion among Christians : Yet these Things being not exactly delivered in the Word of God, nor particular Rules about them determined clearly in Scripture, it is evident that our Lord *Jesus Christ* intended that the Light of Nature and Reason, the common Principles and Rules of Order and Society, and the most prevailing Prospect of Holiness, Truth and Love, should determine our Actions in such Cases ; still keeping close to every Thing, that he has revealed so far as we can find his Will in Scripture ; and in all other Things making the best Use of our Christian Prudence and Charity, for the Glory of God, and the Good of Men. 1 Cor. xiv. 40, 33. *Let all*

QU. XII. *join in one Communion?* 287

*all Things be done decently, and in Order, for God is not the Author of Confusion, but of Peace, as in all Churches of the Saints.*

*1 Cor. x. 31, 32, 33. Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the Glory of God. Give none Offence, neither to the Jews, nor the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God: Even as I please all Men in all Things, not seeking mine own Profit, but the Profit of many, that they may be saved.*

Since it is impossible in this imperfect State, that any Thing in Civil or Religious Affairs should be free from Imperfections, those Methods must at all Times be esteemed the *best*, that aim at the best Ends, and are attended with the *fewest Inconveniencies*. *1 Cor. x. 23. All Things that are lawful, are not expedient; all Things that are lawful, edify not. Rom. xiv. 17, 18. The Kingdom of God is not Meat and Drink, but Righteousness and Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost. He that in these Things serveth Christ with a humble Sincerity of Heart and Design, is acceptable to God, and approved of Men, even though he should not always hit upon the most prudent Means.*

But let *Peace* and *Edification* be ever in our Eye, as our chief Ends in Church-Affairs, according to that great Canon of  
the

288 *May different Opinions, &c. QU. XII.*  
*the Apostle, Rom. xiv. 19. Let us there-*  
*fore follow after the Things which make for*  
*Peace, and Things wherewith one may edify*  
*another. Amen.*



DISCOURSE





## DISCOURSE I.

A Pattern for a dissenting Preacher.

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JOHN vii. 46.

*The Officers answered, Never Man  
spake like this Man.*



HE *Jewish* Church was grown very corrupt when our Lord *Jesus Christ* was sent into the World, as the Reformer of his People, and the Saviour of Mankind. The *Rulers* of the Church hated Reformation, and would not suffer any Thing to be altered in their Establishment. Therefore their Rage against our Saviour rose high, and the *Pharisees and chief Priests sent their Officers to seize him*, as you find in the 32d Verse; to seize *Jesus*, the best Preacher that ever spoke in the Name of God to Men: They sent Men to silence him in the Midst of his Sermon, to summon and constrain  
U him

him to appear before them. The *chief Priests* were the highest Ecclesiastical Governours, and the *Pharisees* were a Set of Men that applied themselves to the Study of their Law, and their Worship, and separated themselves from the rest of the People, under a Pretence of greater Holiness. These *Jewish* Clergy, and *Jewish* Devotees, joined to send their *Servants* upon this wicked Errand to lay hold on *Christ* the Lord. The Persons that were sent, are called *Officers* in my Text: Probably they might be some Ecclesiastical Officers that belonged to their Courts, because we find that the Priests had Power over them, and they gave them Commission for their Work, though we are not acquainted with their particular Title.

But when they came and heard the gracious Words that proceeded from his Mouth, his sublime Doctrines of Truth and Mercy, and his kind Invitations to thirsty Sinners to receive living Water, (as you find in a few Words before my Text) they were astonished and struck silent, they were inwardly restrained from executing their impious Commission; they returned to their Masters without having done their Work: And when they asked them the Reason why they had not brought the Preacher with them, they boldly replied, that their Consciences with-

witheld their Hand from him, for *never Man spake like this Man.*

To improve these Words to our present Advantage, we shall consider,

- I. *What Difference there was between our Lord's Ministry, and the preaching of other Men in that Day.*
- II. *What different Effects it had on those that heard him.*
- III. *Draw some Inferences for our Instruction, and some for our Practice.*

I. We shall consider *what Difference there was between our Lord's Ministry, and the preaching of other Men in that Day.*

It is very likely these Officers had been wont to hear the Sermons of the Scribes, and the Doctrines of the *Jews* in their Synagogues, where *Moses* and the Prophets were read every Sabbath, and generally expounded to the People; but there was something in the *Matter* of these Discourses of our Lord, something in the *Manner* of speaking, but much more in the *peculiar Power* attending the Words, which made these Officers conclude, they had never heard such a Preacher in all their Lives.

I. First then, there is something in the *Matter* of his Preaching different from what those ecclesiastical Officers had been used to hear. Though both *Christ*, and the *Scribes*

and *Pharisees*, all pretended to take the Bible for their Text, yet there was a great Variety in the Subjects which they enlarged upon, and the Substance of their Discourses. They expounded the same *moral Law* which our Saviour did, but it was in so poor and trifling a Sense, in so strange and unreasonable a Manner, so far from the spiritual Design and divine Meaning of it, that our Lord found, when he came into the World, he had Need to go over it all again with a better Comment, lest the *Blind should lead the Blind, and both fall into the Ditch*.

They set forth their Sense of it in so gross and carnal an Exposition, as though all the Commands forbid nothing else but the external Actions of Sin, and required nothing else but the outward Performance of Duty; whereas our Lord *Jesus Christ* makes it appear to them by convincing Reasons *Mat. v.* that he that breaks one of the Commands of God but *in Thought*, he is counted a breaker of the Law in the Sight of God, the infinite Spirit, before whom our Thoughts and Intentions of Mind, and all the Motions of our Hearts, are esteemed as our actual Performances.

They expounded away the Law of God indeed, and they lost the Beauty, the Power, and the Perfection of it by their Comments. Our blessed *Jesus* came to restore it again. They made Holiness to be a very little



little Thing, and an easy Matter ; whereas our Lord shews, it is exceeding hard *to enter in at the strait Gate*, and there needs Labour and Pains to travel onwards in the *narrow Path* that leads to Heaven.

Again, they dwelt much upon the ceremonial Part of their Religion, with too great a Neglect of the moral Part of it; but *Christ* insisted much upon the more substantial and weighty Matters of the Law, Righteousness and Truth, Piety and Love. The *Pharisees*, who were Devotees of their Church, were careful to pay Tithes of Mint, Anise and Cummin, and doubtless their Priests were not backward to preach it; but our Lord *Jesus Christ* makes it his more constant Care, and his perpetual Business, to establish them in the Spirituality and Perfection of the moral Law of God, and touches very little upon Ceremonies, for he thought the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* did that sufficiently of themselves.

Again, they insisted upon the Traditions of the Fathers, and Councils, and Inventions of Men ; *Christ*, upon the Commandments and Words of God. And when any Point of Doctrine, and especially when any Point of Practice was in Dispute, their Recourse was to the *Fathers*; what do the *Traditions* say, what say the Ancients? But our Lord *Jesus Christ* refers them still to some Part of his Father's Word, and quotes

a Text, either to prove a Doctrine, or a Duty.

Thus the Teachers of the established Church, in that Day, instructed the People to build their Hopes of Heaven upon their natural Birth, upon their Relation to *Abraham*, and upon their Passage through that original Ceremony of Circumcision, whereby they were initiated into the *Jewish* Church, and thought they were made sufficient Members of it for eternal Happiness. Our Lord *Jesus* taught them to build their Hopes, rather upon Regeneration, upon Faith and Repentance, upon the inward and mighty Change of their Souls, upon an Alteration of their whole Nature, and a Turn of their Hearts toward God, upon an humble Confession of Sins, and a Dependance on the forgiving Grace of God. In *Mat. iii.* we have a particular Account what it was the *Pharisees* taught them to build their Hopes of Heaven upon, (*viz.*) their being Children of *Abraham*; and *John the Baptist*, who was the Forerunner of our Lord, cuts off that Hold; he nullifies that Foundation, and makes it vanish. *Think not to say within yourselves, We are Children of Abraham, but bring forth Fruits of Repentance.* And *Christ*, in *John iii.* shews, that *If a Man be not born again*, let him pretend never so much to a Birth of the Family of *Abraham*, and to his Passage through the initial Rite of Circumcision, (the

(the Ordinance of that Day) it was in vain for him to hope *to enter into the Kingdom of God.*

They preached up the Doctrine of Justification by their own Works, for the *Pharisees trusted in themselves that they were righteous*; and in their Opinion, whoever would follow the Rules of the *Pharisees*, must be righteous, as well as they, in the Sight of God, and thus go to Heaven upon the Foundation of their own Duties. But our Lord *Jesus Christ* continually shews Men the Imperfection of their own Righteousness, and their utter Insufficiency to perform any Obedience, for which they might be accepted of God to eternal Life. He preached the Gospel of Salvation by the Mercy and Forgiveness of God his Father, and gave Hints of his own Atonement for Sin, and his Mediation with God, as far as was proper in that Day and Time.

They taught the People implicit Faith in their Doctors, or Teachers and Governors, and that they ought to believe as the Church believes, not allowing too nice an Enquiry into all the particular Grounds of it. This evidently appears by the Reply that these Officers received from the chief Priests; for when they acknowledged that our Lord *Jesus spake as never Man spake*, the Priests were ready to reprove them for giving too much Credit to such a Preacher as *Christ*

was, “ *What! do ye believe? Have any of the Rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him?* John vii. 48, 49. And will you dare hearken to a Preacher, and Doctrines, that the Rulers and *Pharisees* reject and renounce, and never gave you Encouragement to depend upon?” So the Man that was born blind, *John ix.* when he argued with them, that surely he must come from God, that could cure one that was born blind, and restore him to Sight again? “Thou wert altogether born in Sin, say they, and dost thou teach us?” And they excommunicated him, or cast him out, But our Lord, when he preaches to the Multitude, he bids them all *search the Scriptures; these are they that testify of me,* John v. 39. If I speak not according to the Language of divine Revelation, and the Word of God, believe me not; I stand or fall by that Test. Thus you see in numerous Instances, notwithstanding our Saviour, and the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, would all seem to take the Bible for their Text, yet how very different the *Matter* or *Subject* of their Discourses were.

2. There was something in the *Manner of his Preaching*, that was different from the Doctors of the *Jewish Church*, as well as in the *Matter* of it. Whether the *Jews* affected any Pomp of Oratory, or studied Periods as the *Greeks* did, is hard to say; but it



it is certain, that our Saviour used the plainest and most simple Style, that every one could understand: Our Lord conveyed the Doctrines of the Gospel to Men, in such a Manner, as was most suitable to attain his sacred Purposes. Sometimes he spoke in Parables, but with this Design to cover under them such Mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, as were not fit to be divulged in their full Brightness and Light at that Day.

Few of the *Jewish* Teachers preached from their Hearts, when they preached pure and strict Religion, for they practised very little of it. But our Lord never preached up any Part of Virtue or Piety but what he practised. Nor when they insisted upon Traditions and Ceremonies, did they always perform them; for our Saviour complains, *they laid heavy Burdens upon the People, which they would not touch with one of their Fingers*, Matt. xxiii. 4. But our Lord *Jesus Christ* preached with the greatest Sincerity, for he believed what he taught, and practised what he required.

They preached in a cold, dull and insipid Way, as they must do, because their Hearts were not in their Work. But our blessed Lord, had doubtless a solemn and awful Air of unfeigned Religion on his Face, and Piety and Goodness shone on his Countenance, while the Words of Truth and Salvation were poured out from his Lips. He taught  
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the Things of God to the People, as one that had Zeal for God, and a tender and compassionate Concern for the Souls of Men; his Zeal appears sufficiently in the Actions of his Life, John ii. 17. *The Zeal of thine House hath eaten me up*, it wasted his natural Spirits. How warm was he in reproving Sin, even the Sins of the Rulers and Priests of the Church in that Day! How kind and melting was his Language, in inviting Sinners to repent and return to God! How large his Promises of Pardon, in the Name of God his Father, *all Manner of Sin and Blasphemy shall be forgiven to Men!* Matt. xii. 31. How moving are his Exhortations to Faith and Hope in himself. Matt. xi. 28. *Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you Rest. Come and take upon you my Yoke and my Burden, for my Yoke is easy, and my Burden light. Come and learn of me*, practise what I preach, and imitate what I do.

The Scribes taught by Way of Exposition, and poor Expositors they were of divine Revelation; and probably they never enforced Holiness on the Conscience with solemn and pathetick Words; *Christ* spake with Authority, as one that came from God, clothed with Power. Mat. vii. 28. *The People were astonished at his Doctrine, for he taught as one that had Authority, and not as the Scribes.*

3. Not only in the *Matter* and in the *Manner* of *Christ's* Preaching, there was some Difference from that of the Doctors of the Age; but *thirdly*, there was more Difference between his Preaching and theirs, in the *Power that attended his Sermons*, for *God was with him*. But the *Jewish Church* was grown so degenerate, that, though God himself did once establish it, yet now he had almost left and forsaken their Priests and their Teachers. There was an Evidence and Demonstration of the Spirit, that attended the Words of *Christ* inwardly to the Hearts and Consciences of Men. Therefore *Christ* could say concerning his preaching, *The Words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit, and they are Life*, John vi. 63. The Spirit of God was given him without Measure, as *John the Baptist* confessed concerning him. John iii. 34. *The Spirit of the Lord was upon him, the Lord had anointed him to preach the glad Tidings of Salvation to Men, to unbind the Captives, and to bind up those that were wounded and broken in Heart*, as in *Luke* iv. 18. which he himself cites from the Prophecy of *Isaiah*, which was spoken of old concerning him. The Spirit of the Lord was upon him and went with his Words, that made the Officers acknowledge, *never Man spake like him*; for they had been used before to a preaching without the Spirit, a preaching where the Spirit of God was hardly



hardly found: And when they came to a Preacher with whom God was, no Wonder they confessed something different between him and them. Now this Power, this secret Power that attended the Ministry of *Christ*, had various remarkable Effects upon the Hearers, which leads me to

II. The *second general Head* proposed, that is, *What were the Effects of the preaching of Christ, whereby it is further differenced from that of the Jewish Doctors.* And in this Part of my Discourse I shall range all my Thoughts under these three Heads; the Effect it had upon the *Multitude*, the Effect it had upon his *own chosen ones*, and the Effect that it had upon his *Enemies*.

1. Let us consider the *Effect that his preaching had on the Multitude.* It amazed them, it gave them uncommon Surprise, Matt. vii. 28. *The People were astonished at his Doctrine.* They wondered, not only at his Miracles whereby he confirmed his Sermons, but at the Sermons themselves. We have a very particular Account of this in Mark vi. 2. *Many that heard were astonished, saying, whence hath this Man these Things?* It set many of them upon the Enquiry, and upon a Search of Heart, what all this his Doctrine might mean, and what they had of Concern in it. They began to debate the Case with themselves, whether he came from God, or no, and whether this was  
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the *Christ*, or no. There was no such Stir among the People while they attended upon the common Sermons of the *Scribes*, and the *Teachers* of the *Jewish* Church. They came back as they went, they sat unconcerned and unmoved. They heard the Oration and the Performance, they seemed perhaps to be pleased with some of those that pronounced better than their Neighbours, and they went away unimproved, unless in Uncharitableness against the Followers of *Christ*, the new Preacher, and in Zeal for Ceremonies, some of which also God had not instituted: These were the Improvements of the Church of the *Jews*, that attended upon the common Preachers of that Day.

When a Nation hath been a long Time buried in Ignorance and Darknes, and been kept under by the Sovereignty and Policy of Priests, and there springs up a new Teacher among them, with some Characters of Divinity about him, they are all awakened and set upon the Enquiry; they see the Difference between their own dull hypocritical Teachers, and the new Spirit of Piety and Devotion. They never before troubled themselves about inward Religion, but now there is a publick open Acknowledgement of something uncommon, and they are willing to consider, whether it be divine, or no. Such was the Case of the *Jews* when our Saviour

Saviour was sent among them; such was the Time of the Reformation of this Nation from *Popery*; and those that taught the Gospel of *Christ* in that Day, in Opposition to the Popish Religion, were called *New Teachers*, (as in Bishop *Burnet's History*) their Ministry was very different from that of the *Romish* Priests and Fryars, and People were set upon the Enquiry, for God opened their Eyes; their Doctrine was according to the Gospel, their Form and Manner of Preaching was warm and zealous, practical and experimental, and the Spirit of God was with them.

This is therefore the first Effect of the Ministry of *Christ*, and will be the natural Effect upon the Multitude, when a divine Preacher, that is distinguished from the common indolent Teachers of the Times wherein he lives, shall be called of God to preach in his Name to Sinners for the Salvation of Men.

2. Let us consider the Effect that the Preaching of *Christ* had upon his own chosen ones. It wrought a mighty and wonderful Change upon them. Some of them were great and grievous Sinners, and they were converted into Saints. Some of them loved the World too well, but afterwards they loved God and *Christ* above all, and renounced this World, in the Hope and Pursuit of a better. *Mary Magdalene*, who is represented

sented as a vile Wretch, comes and sits weeping at the Feet of *Jesus*, acknowledging her Sins, she receives large Forgiveness, and loves her Saviour much, *Luke* vii. 38, 47. Behold her now humble and mourning, in a quite different Frame, Form, and Temper, than what before you might have beheld her among the Crowds of lewd Persons. *Zaccheus* the Publican, behold he distributes his Goods to the Poor, and restores fourfold to those whom he had wronged by his former Violence, he comes and waits as a Disciple of *Jesus*, receives this new Doctrine, and accepts the Salvation, *Luke* xix. 8. There was a Power that attended the Preaching of *Christ*, whereby they were effectually perswaded to give up themselves to his Conduct. *Matthew* forsakes the Receipt of Custom, where perhaps he got many an unjust Penny, to follow our Lord *Jesus Christ*, and abandoned his gainful Office. *Peter, Andrew, James, and John*, left their Nets and fishing Boats, and followed the Lord at his Call. Those that were ignorant were made learned in the Truths of God, in the Law and Gospel. The Poor of the People received the Gospel and divine Grace, and Sinners were converted, sanctified and saved. Sublime and saving Truths were they taught by the Father, under the preaching of *Jesus* his Son. *For Flesh and Blood did not reveal these*



*these Things to them, but my Father which is in Heaven,* says our Lord, *Matt. xvi. 17.* Now there were scarce any such Instances at this Time under the preaching of the *Jewish* Doctors, because the Lord seemed to have left them; and their Hearers being trained up in a formal and customary Round of Ceremonies, which they took to be true Religion, they went on in a blind Hope of the Favour of God, because they were *Abraham's* Seed; but there were very few Instances of Conversion and Regeneration under all their Ministry.

3. Let us consider the *Effect that it had upon the Enemies of Christ.* It is evident that it convinced almost all of them inwardly, and many of them in their Discourses with *Christ* were reduced to Silence and Shame; they had not one Word to reply. They went away, not daring to ask him any more ensnaring Questions, for their Mouths were stopped, *Matt. xxii. 46.* The most impudent and the most learned of them fell together under his Reproof, and the Repetitions of the Doctrines from his Mouth they could not sustain.

Some of his Enemies who heard his Discourses had their Tempers a little softened towards him; those that designed to apprehend him, and went with that Design, were inwardly restrained from touching him. So the Officers in my Text. Others again rose  
into



into a violent Rage and Envy, that their corrupt Doctrines and their evil Deeds were brought to Light, and exposed before the People, and they hated him with more Rancour, and pursued him even to the Death.

III. I proceed now in the last Place to make some *Inferences* for our Instruction, and for our Practice.

We will begin with *Lessons of Instruction.*

I. And the first is this, *that Men may preach without Commission from a national established Church, and yet be owned of God.* Such was the Case of our Lord *Jesus Christ* in my Text, and God discovered to the World how far he honoured him. *Christ* appeared like an Upstart without a Commission, for he was not sent forth from any of the Schools of the Prophets, or from under any of their publick Forms of teaching: Therefore they say concerning him, *as for this Man we know not whence he is,* John ix. 29. He was looked upon as a Schismatick in those Days, as a sort of Separatist from the established Church, and all those that followed him, were opposed under that Pretence. It was thought a sufficient Refutation of his Commission to preach; *Have any of the Rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him?* John. vii. 48. But God sent a divine Testimony into the Hearts of those that heard him, and made them cry out, *Never*

*Man spake like this Man.* It is no Matter whence he comes, says the Man, who felt his Power opening his Eyes, it is no Matter whether he has Authority from you, or no ; for his Miracles and his Doctrine give sufficient Attestation to his Character, and his divine Authority. When *Peter* and *John*, after the Death of their Master proceeded to publish the same Doctrine which *Christ* had done, how were they railed at, and how furiously persecuted by the Rulers of the *Jewish* Church : But God was with them, and by their Ministry he converted Thousands. Look into *Acts* xiv. 17, 18. and following. *Let us*, say the Rulers of the Jews, *let us straitly charge and threaten these Men, that they speak to no Man henceforth in this Name.* There were *Ananias* and *Caiaphas*, *John* and *Alexander*, Kindred of the high Priest, with the Rulers, Elders and Scribes, as you find in the 5th Verse ; and they summoned these new Preachers to appear before them, and commanded them not to speak at all, nor teach in the Name of *Jesus* ; But *Peter* and *John* answered and said, *Whether it be right in the Sight of God to hearken to you more than to God, judge ye ; for we cannot but speak the Things which we have seen and heard.* We that have had in our own Souls a rich and divine Experience of the Power of these Doctrines, and of this Gospel, which we  
preach ;

preach ; we have such a divine Testimony to the Truth of them, that we cannot but publish them, whether you command or forbid us. God owned them with Power, when they had the private House shaken, when they were assembled together, Verse 31, *They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and all spake the Word of God with Boldness.* Let us not therefore suffer ourselves to be imposed upon and terrified with the frightful Name of *Schism*, for our Lord *Jesus Christ*, and his Apostles, had the same Reproach. What if we do not worship according to the prescribed Forms of those that are in Power, yet if we worship according to the Rules established by our Lord *Jesus Christ*, we can vindicate our Consciences to him, and our Consciences will not charge us another Day, nor will our Lord reprove us. We have the Example of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, and his Followers, let us keep close to this Pattern, and not be afraid.

2. We may learn from hence *the distinguishing Power of the Spirit of God when it accompanies his own Word*, that it reaches the Hearts of some with powerful Convictions, while others remain obstinate. *Some say, he deceives the People*, and some would have laid Hands upon him, as in the Verses before my Text, but these Officers were so struck with his Doctrine, that they could

not do it. The Grace of God that attends his own Word is Sovereign, and delights with Glory to distinguish itself amongst the Hearers: Sometimes Servants are convinced and wrought upon with mighty Efficacy, when Masters shall remain ignorant, and stupid, or be provoked to Wrath and Enmity against the Preacher. The rich may blaspheme, while the poor receive the Gospel. The Rulers say, that he was a Deceiver, but the Officers, their Servants, were satisfied there was something divine in his Doctrine, *for never Man spake like him.*

There are some, it may be, that go to the Place of publick Worship, and hear Sermons, in order to revile the Doctrine and the Religion, and perhaps with a spiteful Intent to do some Mischief to those that publish it; but *Christ* shall over-rule them to gain good by the Sermon, and turn their Curse into Blessing. These Officers came probably with Wrath in their Hearts, and with a Design to revile *Jesus*, and lay Hands on him, according to their Orders; but they were constrained to turn away from him with innocent Hands, and they fulfilled not their mischievous Designs. There have been such Examples in our Days, when wicked Men have come to blaspheme God and the Gospel in his Ministers, and to strike our Lord *Jesus Christ* through the Sides of  
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the pure Professors of his Faith and Worship, and they go away Believers; then is that glorious Prophecy fulfilled. *Isai. lxxv. 1. I am found of them that sought me not.* And blessed be God that such Instances are found in our Assemblies, wherein our Lord *Jesus Christ* makes his divine Power appear, and attests his Gospel, according to our Ministrations of it.

3. I infer also from this Text, and Discourse, that *when God resolves to work by his Spirit with his Word, he breaks through all Oppositions and Prejudices of every Kind, and constrains the Hearers to confess, as well as believe.* The divine Conviction strikes like Lightning through their Hearts, and commands their Lips to acknowledge the Presence and Power of God there.

Now I shall exemplify this Head by considering the particular Characters of these Officers, and survey what Difficulties, and what Prejudices they laboured under, when they came first to put themselves under the Preaching of *Christ*, and we shall find this Inference eminently true.

They were educated under the *Jewish* Priests, and doubtless they had their Heads full of Notions concerning a glorious *Messiah*, and they wished for nothing more, than to bear some considerable Office in the Kingdom of that *Messiah*, if he should appear in their

Day; and this is not at all strange, if we reflect that this was the very Mistake and the Temptation of *James* and *John*, who were two Apostles. But when they heard *Christ* preach, they must probably fall under Convictions of a different Kind, and be sensible his Kingdom was spiritual: For he wrought powerfully upon their Spirits, and seemed to give them another Turn of Mind, they confessed and acknowledged though he was mean in his Appearance, and his Character in the World was contemptible, though he carried nothing of Greatness and Magnificence with him, he might be the true *Messiah*, for they were sure *never any Man spoke like him*.

Again, they were supposed to be Enemies in their Hearts to *Christ* before they came; but when God and his Grace was with them by the Mouth of his Son, they felt their Error, they were forced to acknowledge it, and they became his Friends; and instead of delivering him up to the Fury of their Rulers, they screened him from their Rage and Violence, and let him go in Peace.

They were under the Dictates and Authority of the high *Priest* and *Pharisees*, and yet how glorious was the Power and Victory of the Gospel over their Spirits! They dared to disobey their Lords and Masters in this unrighteous Command, to let go the  
Man

Man whom they sent for as a heinous Criminal. As they were under a direct Command to seize the Lord, so they were in Danger of severe Reproaches, and being turned out of their Places, and perhaps of Excommunication too, if they did not fulfil their Orders: But the Power which came with the Word of *Christ* gave them Courage, and they told their Masters, they dared not seize such a Man, a Man that preached at that Rate, *so as never Man preached.*

Now when they not only had the Obstacles and Prejudices of their own irregular Notions founded upon a long Course of Education, but were Enemies to *Christ* in their Hearts, and were under Authority to lay hold of him, yet the Power of God, in the Mouth of his Son, brought them to confess there was something extraordinary in him, and to tell their Rulers so too. All this gave a noble Testimony to the Mission of *Christ*.

Such sort of Witness God was pleased frequently to give to the Gospel of his Son, in the Lips of his Apostles, and his inspired Preachers, in primitive Times. Men who have come into their Assemblies, ignorant of the Gospel, and Disbelievers of *Christ*, have been convinced and judged by the Words which they heard, *the Secrets of their Heart*

have been manifested, they have fallen down and worshipped God, and confessed that God was in the midst of them of a Truth, See 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25. Some Appearances of this kind have been also seen in our Day, and among our Fathers in their publick Labors; and perhaps as many mighty Prejudices, and as great Obstacles have been broken through by the Almighty Power of the Word of God, in the Lips of his Ministers, who derive not their Authority from the State. Such Instances give a divine Testimony to the Words of the Gospel which are published, though the Preachers are not commissioned by the national Establishment. If God gives us his Seal in such a powerful Manner as this is, we will believe our Authority is from God, and not question our Commission.

4. I infer, that the *first Work of God upon the Consciences of natural and carnal Men, is very surprizing to them.*

The Officers seemed to be under Astonishment, and cried out, *Never Man spake like this Man.* Perhaps they were never under a Sermon before, where the Spirit of God attended it, or where their Consciences were in any Measure awakened. And thus it is in our Days, when Persons are under the first Conviction of Sin and Righteousness by the preaching of the Word, they confess they never heard such Words before.

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Though the Matter and the Manner of *Christ's* preaching was very different from that of the *Scribes*, yet I take the biggest Reason of the Exclamation of these Officers, to be the attending Power of the Spirit working upon their Consciences. So poor Sinners, that have long sat under a formal and cold Ministry, and attended twenty Years or more upon it, because they were afraid to change their Preacher, afraid of some terrible Names of frightful Reproach, and afraid lest they should change their Worship to the Name of *Schism*, when they have ventured to go astray into some private worshipping Assembly, and have heard a Discourse whereby they have been awakened to see their Sin, and their Danger, and the Way of Salvation by the Righteousness and the Grace of *Christ*, they are brought as it were into a new World, they are amazed at what they see and feel, they say within themselves, Is this the Gospel of *Christ*? Then I never knew the Gospel till this Day. Such Persons, under the first powerful Impressions of God on their Hearts, are so surprized, that sometimes they hardly know, whether it is the Voice of God, or Man; like *Samuel*, when he was first called to be a Prophet, knew not the Voice of God. They are amazed like the Woman of *Samarita*, when she met with our Saviour,  
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John iv. 29. *Come see a Man who told me all Things that ever I did. Is not this the Christ?* Under such an Amazement have stupid and ignorant Creatures fallen, when they have been first awakened to see the State of their own Souls, and the Salvation of the Gospel in a powerful and converting Light, that they have wondered at the Preacher, as though he were some extraordinary Person, when perhaps his Talents were not uncommon; but the Spirit of God was with him, and commanded divine Light to shine into the Darknes of their Souls, and at this they have been surprized, and been ready to cry out, *Never Man spake like this Man.*

But I shall insist no longer on these Heads, but proceed to some *Inferences for our Practice.*

1. First I would draw an Inference that concerns Ministers who have not Commission from a national Church, *That they should see to it that they have a Call and a Commission from God, and imitate our Lord Jesus Christ in the Discharge of it.* It is not my Business here, my Text does not naturally lead me to it, to enquire into all the Particulars that make up the Call and Commission of a Gospel-Minister; but it is the Business of each of us, when we are well satisfied in our Call to the Ministry, to imitate this glorious Preacher *Christ Jesus.* Let us set before

fore us his Example, who had received no Orders from the *Jewish* Priesthood, especially when we are among a People, who think we are not called to preach, because we have no Ordination from an established Church.

In general we should avoid those Things in our Ministry, wherein we may have just Reason to fear others have been mistaken, and for which God hath contended with them, or departed from them. Not that we should seek after something novel, and out of the Way, on Purpose to avoid their Method, or reject any Thing in the Course of our Ministry, merely because they teach or practise it; this would be highly irrational and improper. But when we find their *Matter* of Discourse, or their *Method* of Ministration hath been unblest of God, or unsuccessful for the Good of Men, we have Reason to see and enquire, whether there is not a more proper Way of preaching to attain the great Ends of the Ministry, even the Glory of God, the Honour of *Christ*, and his Gospel, with the Conversion and Salvation of poor sinful Souls. This was the Practice of the Son of God when he became a Preacher among Men, and let him be our Pattern.

If others therefore in the Matter of their Ministrations, insisting much on the moral Law, have given too narrow Explications of it, and have not informed the People of the  
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spiritual Perfection of it, let us preach it up in the perfect Purity of its Demands, and in the Severity of its Threatnings; let us imitate our Lord *Jesus Christ*, and publish this holy Law in its Spirituality, and its Terrors to awaken, convince and perswade Men. If others have insisted most upon the Ceremonies of Worship, and established Forms, and endeavoured to bind down the Consciences of Men to their Inventions, or to the Traditions of their Fathers, which God never approved of, let us insist upon the Command of God alone, and upon those Rites and Forms of Worship only which he hath instituted: If others have preached up the Sufficiency of baptismal Washing, instead of Regeneration by the holy Spirit, and led their Hearers to a false Presumption that they are born of God, because they have been baptized, let us follow the Doctrine of the blessed *Jesus*, who requires every Man to be born again, to be born of the holy Spirit, as well as of Water, and to be made a new Creature in Heart as well as in Life, in order to enter into the Kingdom of God: If we have found that others have been cold and indolent in their Ministrations, and have been greatly defective in their Zeal for God, if they have had too little Concern for the Souls of Men, and too great an Indifferency for the Salvation of perishing Sinners, let us double our Zeal, let us be more earnest in labouring



labouring to save sinful Creatures, and to bring Saints nearer to God, and to build them up in Faith and Holiness. If we should have Reason to fear the Spirit of God is much departed from others, let us cry with great Earnestness, that the Spirit may never leave our Assemblies, and abandon us to labour in vain without his Influences. Let us long for the Presence of that Spirit in our secret Studies, as well as in our publick Ministrations of the Gospel, which alone can make a *Paul*, or an *Apollos*, to plant and water with Success.

And this may be a Way, not only to do more Service to God, and do more Good to the Souls of Men, but this may be a Means, in the Providence of God, to secure us from the Rage of Men too.

Let us remember, that when the chief Priests, and Rulers, and *Pharisees*, sent to apprehend our Lord *Jesus*, for preaching such Doctrine as he did without their Commission, the Officers who were sent, were impressed in their Consciences with sudden Convictions under his Sermon, and they would not seize him. And God may give such Instances of Deliverance as divine Attestations to our Preaching, if we keep close to the Example of our Lord *Jesus*, and have much of his Spirit with us.

2. The *next practical Inference*, is addressed to those who attend such Ministers as have no Commission from the established Church: If ye have found spiritual Edification from our Labours, you may be encouraged to proceed. Such were many of the People who attended on the Sermons of *Christ*, in the Days of his Flesh. They were sufficiently vindicated in this their following after him, not merely by the Miracles that he wrought to prove his divine Commission, but by the convincing, converting and sanctifying Influence which accompanied his preaching. Let this appear in your whole Conversation, in order to vindicate our Ministry, and your Attendance.

Was it said, even by the Officers of the ecclesiastical Court, concerning him, *Never Man spake like this Man*, let it be said by all the World concerning you, *Never Men lived better than you do*. Let it be acknowledged in the Eyes even of all those that hate you, that the Lives of none of them are comparable to your Lives for strict Holiness and Religion. And this will give a Conviction to the Hearts of Men, and go a great Way to justify your Preachers, and your Attention to their Sermons. This justified the Officers to their own Consciences, in their Neglect to seize *Christ* the Lord, though  
they

they could not learnedly make out his Commission: Nor could they give, it may be, a very rational Account of the Preference of *Christ* to their national and established Preachers, yet they could say; We have felt something in our Hearts from this Man's preaching, that we never felt from the preaching of other Men, therefore we could not seize him, we durst not apprehend him, we believe he hath something divine in him.

It may be, many of you know not how to argue upon the Reasons of your *Separation*, or *Non-conformity*, but if you feel such inward Evidence in your Hearts, and if the Evidence witnesses also in the Holiness of your Lives, and runs through all your Conversation, if you have felt in the Sermons of those that are not commissioned, some divine Influences that you never felt elsewhere, then you will say, these are the Servants of the most high God; and without any particular Reflections upon the publick Church, or the publick Way of Worship, you will have abundant Reason to keep close to those Teachers where you have felt Conviction and Sanctification under the Word.

When it shall be enquired, *What do you more than others*, let there be a fair and glorious Answer ever at Hand, that is legible in your Lives by all Mankind; let the Grace  
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of God in your Heart, and abounding Virtue and Piety in your Lives speak for you, that you attend upon Men who do not preach as others do, and that you are made to live such Lives as others do not live. Let your Christian Government of yourselves in Sobriety, in Temperance, in Abstinence from the Lusts of the Flesh, in Mortification to this World, and Deadness to the Vanities of this Life, plead for you and for your Preachers. Let it appear you are taught better than others by your living better than the rest of Men, in faithful, just, and merciful Behaviour towards your Neighbours, in strict Honour and Honesty, in Purity of Life, in Innocency and Usefulness among your Fellow-Creatures. Let it appear that you bind yourselves to the Rules of Morality and Piety, stronger than others do, even by the Death of *Christ*, and the Love of God in *Christ Jesus*, whose sacred Name as a Mediator, a Ruler and a divine Pattern, is ever dwelling on the Lips of your Preachers.

O never let it be said concerning you, that you are ready to cheat in your Traffick, that you are apt to deal deceitfully in your Merchandize, and you are prone to outwit others, and to undermine them in the Management of your secular Affairs. Never let it be charged upon any of you in your Trades, that you skrew down the Seller, and strain  
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up the Buyer, to extravagant and unreasonable Prices for your covetous and exorbitant Gain. But let all be open and generous, plain and simple, without Fraud, and without Extortion; such as may honour the Gospel of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, and give a Character of Honour too, to that Ministry upon which you attend, since it has not national and established Ordinations and Honours. Let your Carriage towards God in your secret Worship, and your publick Attendance upon divine Ordinances, be of a Piece with your Conversation in the World; let it be known by the heavenly and holy Temper of your Spirits, that you are the Sons of God, that your Hearts are renewed, your Souls are changed from what they were by Nature, and your Lives are gloriously different from the Lives of others, and thereby give Honour to the Gospel that is preached among you.

This will enable you to bear the Reproaches of Schism and Separation from a national Church; but how can you bear them, if you have not something that carries you above these Reproaches? Can you be content to be as loose, as vain, as careless in your Manners towards God, and towards your Neighbour, as others are, and yet to give yourselves all the Trouble of Separation from them in Worship, and bear the Reproaches of this Separation? This is

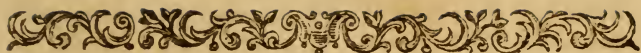
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not acting wisely, it will not quit cost; here you run a certain Risque, and yet you lose all the Profit you might hope for. If therefore you chuse to attend upon such a Ministry as has not the publick Commission, let it be said concerning you, *No Men live like these Men*; that even those that avoid and fly from your Assemblies, and who never have heard your Ministers, may yet be able to infer from your Lives, that *other Men speak not as these Men speak.* Amen.



DISCOURSE



## DISCOURSE II.

A Sermon preached at the Separation of two Deacons to their Office.

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I TIM. iii. 13.

*For they that have used the Office of a Deacon well, purchase to themselves a good Degree, and great Boldness in the Faith which is in Christ Jesus.*



S there is a divine Order in the invisible Church, and the whole Management of that large spiritual Family is conducted by Rules of divine Wisdom, so the Lord hath appointed a beautiful Order in his visible Church; and in his Book he hath

given us the *Pattern of his House*, and the Manner of the Officers and Ordinances thereof; at least the biggest Lines of it are drawn fair and plain, though some of the lesser Circumstances may be more obscurely expressed. By a due Study of the Scriptures, and the Exercise of our common Reason, we may find a Rule to guide us, in the most considerable and necessary Affairs that belong to the Constitution and Regulation of the House of God.

*Christ* himself, the Son of God, dwelling in Flesh is the Head, the chief Shepherd and Overseer of all his visible Church upon Earth; for he wears a visible Body, though for a Season he be departed from our Sight, and dwells in Heaven; thither he ascended to *receive the Promise of the Spirit, and to bestow Gifts upon Men*, Acts ii. 23. and *Eph.* iv. 8, 11. By these Gifts he furnished Persons, and fitted them to sustain Offices of an *ordinary* or an *extraordinary* Character.

The *extraordinary* Officers were Apostles and Prophets, and some suppose Evangelists also, these were to continue only for a Season; the *Ordinary* are Pastors and Teachers, Elders and Deacons, which are to continue through all Ages of the Church.

To omit all the Disputes that have been raised how far Pastors, Teachers, Elders and Bishops or Overseers differ from one another, I shall at present consider all the ordi-



ordinary Church Officers, as included under these two Names, Bishops and Deacons. For thus the Apostle seems to include them, 1 *Phil.* i. The visible Church of *Christ* on Earth is composed of Spirits dwelling in Flesh, and as the *Bishops* or *Overseers* chiefly exercise their Care toward the Soul or spiritual Part, so the chief Care of the *Deacons* seems to relate to the Body, and Things belonging to it : And as there are some special Persons in the Church, to whose outward Welfare the Care of the Deacon must be extended, so the whole Church, considered as a Society meeting together for Worship, will need some Conveniencies for the outward Performance of that Worship, which seems to be another Part of the Deacons Business. But I proceed to pursue my Discourse according to the Text, whereby this will appear with more Evidence.

There are these three Things contained in the Words.

I. *The Office itself.*

II. *The due Discharge, or Performance of it,* and

III. *The Encouragement, or Reward.*

I. First, the *Office itself.* Under which we shall consider four Things, (*viz.*) The Business of it ; the Reason of its Institution ;

the Duration of it; and the ordinary Method of investing a Person with it.

I. *The Business of a Deacon* is expressed very briefly in *Acts* vi. 2. *To serve Tables*, or to manage Affairs that relate to the Provision for the Table of the Poor, to which are added in the general Construction of the Words, the Table of the Ministers, and the Table of the Church at the Lord's Supper.

*The Poor* oftentimes make a considerable Part in Christian Churches. In the Beginning *the Poor received the Gospel*. And thus it is still, *Not many rich, not many noble are called, but God hath chosen the poor of this World rich in Faith, and Heirs of the Kingdom*. 1 Cor. i. 26, 28. and James ii. 5. Now as it is the Duty of the rest of the Church, and especially of the rich, to communicate toward the Supply of the Wants of their poor Brethren, so it is the proper Business of the *Deacons* to receive and to distribute these Supplies; and no doubt but it is their Duty to excite and exhort those whom they see negligent, and to urge them to the Performance of these Works of Love and Piety.

*The Table*, or outward Support of *the Ministers*, ought to be provided by the Church also. 1 Cor. ix. from the 4th to the 14th Verse. *The Lord hath ordained, that they that preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel*. And it seems very convenient, that  
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one or more Persons should be deputed to see this performed, that so the Ministers may not be too much exposed to a Sollicitude about outward Things, nor their Cares too much laid out upon the Necessaries of the Life of their Bodies, while they should rather *be devoted*, or entirely *given up to the Word of God and Prayer*, for the Service of Souls.

Besides, if the Ministers of the Church were forced to expect and receive the several Portions of their Maintenance from the several Persons of the Church, their own Collection of it would take up too much of their Time, would expose them to the Censure of Covetousness and Greediness, would too much impose upon their Modesty, or would make their Maintenance fall short.

And I might add also their Subsistence, which is but an Act of Justice due from the Church, would look too much like mere Charity, and appear too precarious and dependent; and their Obligations to particular private Persons, would too much expose them to the Temptation of Partiality, in the Exercises of their Ministrations, and in their pastoral Care. Whereas this is forbidden to Ministers, 1 *Tim. v. 21. Do nothing by Partiality.* We might be more afraid to reprove some that were rich and kind, and more negligent in comforting and instructing others that were poor, and could give but  
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little. But when the Minister receives his Support from the Church in general, by the Hand of the Deacons, as Officers of the Church, then he is much more secured from these Temptations. And no doubt it is the Duty of the Deacons to see to it, that each Member of the Church perform their Part toward the Support of the Ministry; for it hardly seems decent for the Minister himself to urge this Duty on the People\*.

The *Table of the Church at the Lord's Supper*, is maintained by the Contributions of the Church. The Bread and Wine must be bought at the publick Expence, but particularly provided for by the *Deacons*, who in short are Stewards of all the temporal Affairs that relate to the Church, even as the *Biskops* and *Elders* are of the spiritual; and both under our Lord *Jesus Christ*, who is the great Pastor of Pastors, and Churches, and the Feeder of his own Poor, and provides all Things for all.

I might add to these, that the Business of a Deacon seems also to extend to some Care of the Place of publick Worship, and all the Necessaries that belong to the outward Service of the Lord, such as Tables, Seats, Vessels for Bread and Wine, and for  
Water

\* There is a very good Discourse on this Subject, (*viz.*) the *Maintenance of a Christian Ministry*, published by Mr. *David Rees*.



Water in Baptism, &c. For though these Things are not particularly expressed among the Busineses of a Deacon, yet they will never be performed, unless some one or more Persons be deputed for this Service; and who can be more proper Persons than those, who by divine Institution are intrusted with the Contributions of the Church. Yet in most of these Affairs it is necessary to advise with the Pastor, and with the whole Church, and in every important Matter to take their Direction; for the Deacons are but Stewards, and not Proprietors or Possessors of the Churches Treasure, nor are they Lords of the temporal Things relating to the Church.

2. The Reason of their Institution, which is to assist the Ministers or Elders of the Church in the Care of all those Things, which if devolved entirely upon the Elders, would hinder them from their proper Business, (*viz.*) *the Word and Prayer*. The Apostles, who were the Elders and Rulers of the Church at *Jerusalem* at that Season, managed the Affairs of Collection and Distribution at first, Acts iv. 35. *The Disciples brought the Money and laid it down at the Apostles Feet, and there was a Distribution to every one according to their Need*. But, Acts vi. 1, 2. *When the Disciples were multiplied, the Elders could not take Care of all the Poor;*

Poor ; therefore the Order of *Deacons* was instituted in the next Verse ; and we find in *Acts* xi. 30. That the Elders, or Ministers, were not utterly divested of all Power or Care of the Contributions, for *Paul* and *Barnabas* themselves received the Contributions of the Church at *Antioch*, to be disposed of to the poor Saints in *Judea* : And *Acts* xii. 25. *Barnabas* and *Saul* are said to return from *Jerusalem*, having fulfilled this Service, τὴν διακονίαν, *This Work of a Deacon*, as it is in the Original. So that as the ruling Elders probably are *Helps* in Government, as the Teachers are *Helps* in Doctrine and catechising, so the Deacons are *Helps* to the Pastor in the Management of all the outward and temporal Affairs that relate to the Churches Welfare. Now if these Things are so, the following Consequences will arise.

1. That in Churches which are very small, there is no absolute Necessity of such Officers, as *ruling Elders* or *Deacons* ; for the Pastor may perform all the Services necessary in that Church, with some very little Assistance from the Brethren, at such special Occasions, wherein his own Modesty may excuse him, or his other Labors prevent him. It is plain the Deacons were not chosen, till Disciples were multiplied.

2. As Pastors and ruling Elders are not utterly divested of the Care of the Poor by the Institution of Deacons, so the Deacons ought

ought not to determine any Thing of considerable Importance, without consulting the Elders, as I have hinted before ; nor in Affairs of this kind of the biggest Moment, ought any Thing to be determined by Elders and Deacons, without the Cognizance and Approbation of the Church, for in these temporal Things we are all but *Stewards* of what the Church intrusts us with.

3. Hence perhaps we may borrow another Argument for the Extent of the Deacon's Care, *i. e.* that it reaches to all those Things of a temporal Nature, wherein the Brethren of the Church may help the Elders ; for this is the very Design of the Deacon's Office, lest the Elders, or Ministers of the Church, might be too much interrupted in their continual *Attendance on the Word and Prayer* ; and especially where there are no *ruling Elders* chosen to assist the *Pastor* or *Teacher*, in managing Church Affairs, the Care of the *Deacons* seems still to be more extensive for the Help of the Pastor. And perhaps the Word *Helps*, 1 Cor. xii. 28. may have some Reference to these Offices of ruling Elders and Deacons.

3. *The Duration of this Office.* Doubtless it was designed to continue throughout all Ages of the Church, which appears from these two Reasons :

1. The Objects of their Care always continue. *The Poor ye have always with you.*  
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ness of this Life, but they may now and then devote their Thoughts, and their Hours, to the Service of the Church of *Christ*.

2. *They must be proved* before they are fixed in this Office, 1 *Tim.* iii. 10. I do not conceive this to intend their Management of the *Deacon's* Office, by Way of Experiment for a Year or two; but rather a farther Character of the Persons chosen. Let them be such as are of some considerable standing in Christianity, whose Character and Conversation *has been proved and found blameless*, and fit for such an Office. It seems to signify the same with that Character of a *Bishop*, Ver. 6. *That he must not be a Novice*, i. e. Not one that is lately converted, or lately received into the Christian Church.

3. They must be *chosen by the Church*, Acts vi. 3. *Brethren, look ye out among you seven Men*, &c. The Pastors, or Elders, must not chuse them without the Church, for the Apostles themselves, who were inspired, would not determine the Persons, but left the Church to chuse them, to show us the stated Method of chusing ordinary Officers in a Church.

4. They must *accept of the Call of the Church*, and that freely, and they must solemnly devote themselves to the Service of *Christ* and the Church. For all the  
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Subjects and Servants of *Christ* in his visible Kingdom must be voluntary, and the Office of a *Deacon* must be undertaken *willingly, and not by Constraint*, even as the Office of a *Bishop*, 1 Pet. v. 2.

5. They must be *devoted and separated to this Work* by the solemn Prayers of the Church, and seeking the divine Benediction upon them in the Discharge of their Office. So were *Paul* and *Barnabas* separated to the Work of the Ministry amongst the *Gentiles*, Acts xiii. 2, 3. And so the *Deacons* to their Office. *Acts* vi. 6.

Here note, that the Elder, or Elders of the Church, Ministers and Teachers, are to be the chief Agents in this Affair. So you find the Apostles and Teachers were the chief Agents in the two Texts just cited: And as Ministers may pronounce a Benediction, or Blessing, in the Name of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, so perhaps here it may be proper for the Minister to *pronounce them blessed*, if they faithfully perform this Office, as well as to *pray for a divine Blessing* upon them.

The great Dispute and Enquiry, whether *Imposition of the Hands of Elders in this Benediction*, is now necessary, as in the primitive Times, may be thus resolved: In many Scriptures, where Imposition of Hands is mentioned, there were extraordinary and miraculous Gifts conferred: You find this  
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in *Stephen* and *Philip*, two of the first Deacons, and you frequently find the Holy Ghost conferred on Men by this Ceremony, *Acts* viii. 17, 18. and ix. 17, 18. &c. Nor can I find one plain and certain Instance of Hands imposed in the primitive Churches, where we are sure it was but an ordinary Separation to an Office without any extraordinary Gifts conferred, or an inspired and effectual Benediction given by an inspired Person. Therefore I cannot conceive it necessary to be now practised; for if it had been necessary, surely there would have been some more certain Direction and Command for it.

But since there is so much Colour given to it by some Examples or Expressions in Scripture, where we cannot certainly prove that extraordinary Gifts were conferred, we leave every Church, and every Elder, to their own Liberty, of Opinion and Practice; and those that will impose Hands in such a Way of Benediction, upon any chosen Officers in a Church, shall never be censured by me, nor dare I pronounce it idle or unlawful. Yet still I think, if there be any Elder or Elders, in that particular Congregation to which they belong, these are the most proper Persons to perform such a Ceremony.

I would add here, that as there were many Sorts of Consecration of old in *Jewish* Times, by Washings, Sprinklings, Water, Fire,

Fire, &c. In the New Testament Things are said to *be sanctified by the Word and Prayer*, 1 Tim. iv. 5. And therefore some useful Instructions and Exhortations from the Word of God, seem very proper at the Consecration of a *Bishop*, or of a *Deacon*, as well as Prayer.

Let us proceed to the

II. *Second Thing* expressed in the Text ; that is, to shew *how the Persons ordained may attain to a good Performance of this Office, of a Deacon*. Then a Man *uses the Office of a Deacon well*, when

1. He does it with *sincere Design for the Honour of God, and Zeal for the Good of the Church*. This single Eye, this sincere Aim, ought to attend every Action of a Christian, and especially every Part of the Practice of a Church Officer, whose Business has a more direct Design of this End, and should have a more immediate and manifest Tendency toward it. Simplicity and godly Sincerity should run through the whole Course of Services in a Church, without fleshly Wisdom and carnal Interests.

2. *With Diligence and Care* : When *Artaxerxes* the King gave Command to the Treasurers of his State (which are much the same as Deacons in a Church) to assist *Ezra* the Priest in building the Temple, he charges them, *Whatsoever is commanded by the God of Heaven, let it be diligently done for the House*  
Z
of

of the God of Heaven, Ezra vii. 23. Let this be a Reproof to each of us, when we are negligent about any Thing in the Church of God.

Deacons should not only supply those Wants that are made known to them, but be careful in enquiring into the Necessities of the Church, whether such Persons may not want Relief, who are too modest to burden the Church, or ask Support of the Publick. Whether *Onesiphorus* was a Deacon or no, is not certain, but he fulfilled the Office of a Deacon, *διακονος*, both in *Ephesus* and at *Rome*, when he sought out Paul diligently, and often refreshed him, and ministered unto him in many Things, 2 Tim. i. 16, 17, 18.

The Number of Deacons is not determined in Scripture, but so many ought to be chosen, whose due Diligence, according to their Circumstances, may answer the Necessities of the Church, without being overburdened themselves.

3. The Office of a Deacon must be performed *with Prudence and Discretion*: Distinguishing who are poor indeed from those who are covetous and pretendedly poor; that the Church be not charged more than is necessary, 1 Tim. v. 16.

4. *With Faithfulness to the Church and to the Poor, and to the Ministry*: For in all Cases, it is required of Stewards that they be faithful,



*faithful*, 1 Cor. iv. 2. Distributing the Contributions for the several Services of the Church, according to the Design for which it is given by the Church, is their Duty.

5. *Without Partiality.* Not neglecting any Part of their Office, or the Service of any of the Tables to which they are called, but laying by all carnal Respects, 1 Tim. v. 21. Distributing to the Poor, according to the Degree of their Poverties and Necessities, whether these be constant or occasional: And this must be done with an impartial View, *without preferring one before another*, upon any selfish or carnal Considerations.

6. *With Chearfulness, and not grudgingly*, Rom. xii. 8. *He that sheweth Mercy, let him do it with Chearfulness, he that ruleth with Diligence*; which Words seem to be spoken concerning the Deacons and Elders of a Church. They ought not to be lavish of the Church's Money, nor ought they to be fond of saving, and too thrifty, lest the Poor be grieved, and the Church dishonoured by the Hardships which any of their Members suffer.

7. *With Gentleness and Compassion.* Treating the Poor kindly, in Imitation of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, who condescended to the meanest, and pitied the Poor: His Servants they are his *Deacons*, and he expects they should take tender Care of his Members, not

using them roughly, nor speaking hard Things to them lest their Spirits be broken.

8. I cannot but think that *occasional Instructions, Admonitions, Consolations and Prayers, with, and for the Poor*, ought to accompany the Performance of a *Deacon's Office*; for these Things are in some Measure the Duty of every *Christian*, as it is frequently intimated by *St. Paul*; and much more surely of those who bear an Office in the Church, and who are called to a more particular Acquaintance with the State of it, and converse with the Members of it; and especially when it is a Piece of their Character, that *they must hold the Mystery of Faith in a pure Conscience*; i. e. they must be Men of a good Acquaintance with the great Truths of the Gospel, and of an unblemished Character for Sincerity and Piety.

It is certain, that as they are intrusted with the Temporalities of the Church, and know when there are any Deficiencies with Regard to the Table of the Minister, or the Poor, it is their Duty to admonish the Members, and especially the rich among them to do their Part toward the Supply of their Wants.

It may be observed, that the first Deacons had extraordinary Gifts of the Spirit, and were eminently furnished for such Work, as Exhortation and Prayer. *Philip* and

and *Stephen*, who were two of the first seven Deacons of the Church at *Jerusalem*, were Preachers of the Gospel. Compare *Acts* vi. 5. with Ver. 9, 10. and *Acts* viii. 5. And in the Account which *St. Paul* gives us of Deacons in my Text, all of them have such an honourable Encouragement of *arriving at higher Degrees* in the Church, as gives us Reason to suppose they were sometimes employed in some ministerial Services relating to the spiritual State of the Poor, as well as their temporal Necessities.

And yet it must be still granted, that the original Design of the Institution of Deacons, was to assist the Pastors in the Ministration to the Necessities of the Poor, and Distribution of the Monies which were collected for this Purpose, and not to preach the Gospel publicly, though the first Deacons having extraordinary Gifts, were often so employed.

III. The *third Thing*, in the Text, is the *Encouragement given to the due Performance of a Deacon's Office*. It is said by the Apostle, *they purchase to themselves a good Degree, and great Boldness in the Faith which is in Jesus*.

“ The late Reverend and learned Dr. Owen believes this καλὸν Βαθμῶς, or good Degree and Confidence in the Faith, to signify no more, but a Place or Seat of some Eminency in the Church Assemblies,

“ which is due unto such Deacons, where  
 “ with Boldness and Confidence they may  
 “ assist in the Management of those Affairs  
 “ of the Church which belong unto the  
 “ Profession of the Faith which is in *Christ*  
 “ *Jesus* ;” but he adds, “ If any shall ra-  
 “ ther think, that both of these Expressions  
 “ do signify an Increase in Gifts and Grace,  
 “ which is a certain Consequence of Mens  
 “ faithful Discharge of their Office in the  
 “ Church wherein many Deacons of old  
 “ were eminent unto Martyrdom, I shall not  
 “ contend against it.” Others think that  
 καλὸν Βαθμὸν, or *good Degree*, signifies the Of-  
 fice of the *Presbytery*, which they obtain by  
 a due Performance of the Office of a *Dea-*  
*con*.

If I might give my Conjecture, I would explain it these two Ways.

1. They obtain a good Degree of Honour and Respect *from the Elders*, for the Assistance which they give them in Church Affairs ; *from the Poor*, for their Compassion and Tenderneſs toward them, and Supply of their Wants ; and *from the whole Church*, for their Fidelity, Wisdom and Diligence in the Management of all the temporal Affairs that relate to the Church, for the Honour of the Gospel, and Convenience of the Members,

2. By conversing much with the Elders of the Church, by acting in Concert with  
 them,



them, by visiting the Poor, and performing private Christian Services towards them such as Exhortation, Consolation, and Prayer, and by a constant Acquaintance and Observation of Church Affairs, they acquire greater Knowledge, they improve their Gifts and their Graces, they grow bold to speak of the Faith of *Christ* more publickly, and have taken a good Degree, or a good Step, towards the Office of a ruling, or a teaching Elder, in the Church.

And this is a very proper Expression concerning those Times, when Christian Churches were the only Schools for the Education of Ministers; and the Exercise of Gifts, in and for the Service of the Church, was one chief Means of their Preparation for it. I confess in our Day, since we have many outward Advantages for the Education of Ministers in Learning, and their Improvement in Knowledge, and in all Gifts, it is not so usual, nor so necessary, that a *Deacon* should grow up into an *Elder*, or *Bishop*. Yet in some Churches, such Persons have been found in late Years, who have been deservedly called to the Office of the Ministry, by the great Improvement of their Gifts in the Church, their uncommon Degree of Knowledge and Grace, and the peculiar Blessing of God.

After all, this is certain, that those that grow old in such an Office, well performed,

grow honourable in the Sight of God and Man, for *God is not unrighteous*, my Friends, *to forget your Work and Labour of Love, which ye have skewed toward his Name; in that ye have ministered to the Saints, and do minister, and we desire that every one of you would skew the same Diligence unto the End,* Heb. vi. 10, 11, 12.

## I N F E R E N C E S.

1. We may see something of the Beauty of Gospel-Order, in the several Offices of a Church of *Christ*; but I shall now remark it only in these two Respects, (1.) That as the visible Church here on Earth, and the Members of it, have many bodily Necessities and Conveniencies to be supplied, as well as their Souls to be instructed and edified; so there are distinct Persons of divine Appointment commissioned to manage these Affairs, and fulfil these Services, (*viz.*) Pastors and Deacons. (2.) Another Part of the Beauty of that Order consists herein, that the one is to act in Subordination to the other; the Deacons are chosen for the Assistance of the Elders, and thus acting together by a sweet Concurrence, the Church is preserved in Peace, the Necessities of it are supplied, and the Gospel honoured.

2. See here the Tendernefs of *Christ*, the great Head of the Church towards his Ministers,

nisters, and his Poor: He has instituted Officers to take Care of their outward Subsistence, as well as required the Church to contribute for that End. Hereby the Poor will not be left to perish, nor ought they to be exposed to extreme Hardships, if the Church can prevent it: Hereby Ministers are secured from a too great Solitude about their own Maintenance, and from Interruptions in their more proper Work, as well as from the malicious Censures of the World, which would fall upon them, if they were overburdened with secular Cares and Concerns, either for the Church, for the Poor, or for themselves.

3. Learn from my Text, that the Services which are done for *Christ* and the Church, have their Rewards annexed to them for their Encouragement in this World, besides the infinite Recompence of Reward in the World to come. Faithful Deacons in a Church, obtain a good Degree of Honour and Esteem.

4. From the Deacons of a particular visible Church, we may raise our Thoughts unto our Lord *Jesus Christ*, who is the great *Minister*, and *Bishop of Souls*; and I may call him too, the great and *universal Deacon* of God the Father in the Church invisible. The Father has given into his Hand the Riches of his Grace, the Treasures of his Love, divine Food and spiritual Clothing,

Clothing, Mansions of Glory and Inheritances in Light; to be distributed amongst his poor Saints, that they may be nourished and brought through this Wilderness, and that they may be enriched with Grace, be brought home to Heaven, and be for ever blessed. He is diligent and faithful, he is wise, and gentle, and compassionate, and answers all the Characters of a *Deacon* in the highest Degree. He spreads a Table for starving Sinners, and furnishes it with his own Flesh and Blood; he feeds us with the Bread of Life, and with living Water, that we may eat, and drink, and live for ever.

And in this Sense, when the Deacons are *serving Tables*, and supplying the Wants of the Poor, and the Church visible, out of what is trusted with them; let them remember and rejoice, that they represent the Character of our Lord *Jesus*, as he is intrusted with all Supplies from the Hands of the Father, and distributing unto the Church invisible. To him let the Eyes of your Faith be lifted for Wisdom, for Gifts and Grace, to manage the Affairs with which you are intrusted, and he shall fulfil the Promises of a large Reward. *Amen.*





## D I S C O U R S E   I I I .

### Invitations to Church-Fellowship.

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P S A L. l x v. 4.

*Blessed is the Man whom thou choosest  
and causest to approach unto thee,  
that he may dwell in thy Courts :  
We shall be satisfied with the Good-  
ness of thy House, even of thy Holy  
Temple.*



THE latter Words of the Verse shall be the Subject of our present Meditations, wherein we shall consider what is meant by *dwelling in the Courts of God*, and what is *the Goodness of his House* where- with his Favourites *shall be satisfied*. There  
are

are three Senses of this sacred Phrase, *dwelling in the Courts of God*; and the Persons who are favoured to inhabit the Sanctuary in either of these Senses, may have the *Blessing* of the Psalmist pronounced upon them.

The *first*, and the most obvious Meaning of the Words, *dwelling in the Courts of God*, is, *a continual Attendance on him in the Ministrations of his Temple, and the Discharge of some holy Office there*. This was the Felicity of several of the *Priests* and the *Levites* of old under the *Jewish* Dispensation: And this is the Happiness of the *Ministers* of the Gospel now, who are continually employed in the Things of God, and the Affairs of Religion; who *give themselves up*, as the Apostles did, *to the Ministry of the Word and Prayer*, Acts vi. 4. Whose Business it is to *attend to Reading, to Exhortation, and to Doctrine, to meditate on God and Christ and Salvation*, to converse with the glorious Invisibles of the upper World, and *give themselves wholly to them*, as the Apostle charges *Timothy* the young Evangelist, 1 *Tim.* iv. 13, 15. Blessed is the Man whom God chooses for a Christian and a Minister, whose *general Calling*, in common with the rest of Christians, is to save his own Soul, and whose *particular Employment* as a Minister is to save the Souls of others. This Order of Men are utterly unworthy of their Privilege, if they do not prize

prize it highly, set a just Value upon it, and confess their own Happiness.

But I have shewn elsewhere, that this Sense of the Words, which is limited to *Priests* and *Levites*, could never include the whole Meaning of *David*; for then he had excluded himself from this Blessedness, who was not of the Tribe of *Levi*, nor capable of Priesthood; and yet he declares with holy Joy, that he *would dwell in the House of the Lord for ever*, Psal. xxiii. ult.

The *second* Sense of the Words therefore, and which seems to be the very Design of the *Psalmist* is this: Blessed are they *whose Habitation is near to the Ark of God, and the Tabernacle*, and thereby they are made capable of frequenting the House of God, and of waiting upon him with great Constancy in the holy Ordinances of his Worship. These are the Persons whom my Text pronounces happy: There was but one Tabernacle, and one Ark in the Days of *David*, and but one Temple in succeeding Ages appointed for all the Inhabitants of the Land of *Canaan*; but one Place where God had recorded his Name, and appointed the publick Sacrifices, and peculiar Solemnities of Worship, on which all the Men of *Israel*, who lived at the farthest Distance, were obliged to attend three Times a Year: But those whose Habitation was near the Place where the Ark resided, and these Solemnities were performed,

formed, had more frequent Opportunities of such Attendance.

The *Doctrine*, which we may derive from this Sense of the Words, may be thus expressed.---*Happy are those Persons whose Circumstances and Stations of Life, are appointed by Providence in so favourable a Manner, as to give them Liberty to come up constantly to the House of God, and wait upon him in all his Institutions: And the Instances of their Happiness are evident enough. For*

1. *These are nearer to the Visits of God, and may see him oftner than others.* These may have such a frequent Sight of *his Power and Glory*, as they are to be seen in the *Sanctuary*, Psal. lxiii. 2. It is a Pleasure to be near our best Friend, to be near our dearest Father, to be near our own God. When we have a Relation dwells near us, how often we are present with them! And they that dwell near the Court, have Opportunity of seeing the King upon every Occasion.

2. *These have more external Helps towards Heaven, than others have.* It is true, we have a glorious Mercy in this Respect, that the Scriptures are every where in our Hands, and many Labours of holy Men in Writing, *who being dead, yet speak*; but the Ministry of the Word in the House of God, is the great Ordinance for Conversion and Edification. It is the chief standing Institution  
of



of *Christ* for this Purpose, even to the End of the World.

3. *These Persons have Supplies of their Wants nearer at Hand; and whatsoever their Burdens be, they are nearer to Relief; whether their Complaints are of a spiritual or temporal Kind. How often has the Soul that was in the dark and perplexed, received Hints of Direction in the Ministry of the Word! How often has the tempted Christian been strengthened and supported there! And the Mourning Saint has been often comforted. And even when we labour under temporal Necessities and Sorrows, though the Sanctuary is not furnished to supply every Thing of this kind, yet the Words of Grace and Consolation that have been heard in the Church, have often born up the Spirit of the Poor and the afflicted; they have been led to the Mercy-Seat, the Spring of all Supplies, and they have gone away patient under their Burdens, and rejoicing in Hope of Deliverance here, or full Salvation hereafter. We in this World are travelling through a Wilderness, a dry Land: Now to be near a sweet Fountain, or rather to have a sweet Stream flowing by us all the Way, is a choice Comfort; while those that are afar off die for Thirst, or go many a long Hour without Supply. See *Psal.* lxxiii. 1, 2. where *David* being afar off from the House of God, cries out aloud after him. O God,*  
*thou*

*thou art my God, early will I seek thee; my Soul thirsteth for thee, my Flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty Land, where no Water is; to see thy Power, and thy Glory, &c.*

Happy those who dwell near the Celebration of divine Ordinances, for these are the Persons who stand fair to obtain all Advantages of the House of God, and *to be satisfied with the Goodness of his holy Temple.*

Before I dismiss this *second* Sense of the Words, I shall make these two or three *Reflections.*

*Ist Reflection. How much do those Fellow-Creatures want our Pity, and our Prayers, whose Station places them afar off from the Courts of God, and who are deprived of all the blessed Advantages that are to be enjoyed in the Church! Let us, whom divine Providence has favoured with a nearer Approach to God, fill his Courts with the Voice of Joy and Praise for our peculiar Mercies; and let our Hearts at the same Time feel a becoming Compassion towards those who are afar off. O pity those who dwell in the Lands of Darknests and Heathenism, and have nothing near them that looks like Religion, but the Courts of Idolatry, and their abominable Rites and Ceremonies; filthy Ceremonies, and fantastick or cruel Rites with which they worship Images of Wood or Stone, and their brazen or their golden Gods. Pity the Wretches who dwell under*  
*Anti-*

*Antichristian Tyranny*, where every Thing sacred is over-run with Superstition, and the pure Ordinances of the Gospel are daubed over so thick with various Painting, and so buried under a Load of human Inventions, as to diminish, if not utterly destroy, all their Use and Power. Pity the *Protestants whose Places of Worship are demolished*, and the Sanctuaries are thrown down all over their Land. Pity the *holy Confessors* that are banished from the Courts of God, and his beloved Worship; and those who are shut up in Prisons, inclosed in Dungeons, under heavy Bonds of Iron; and those also who groan in Secret in their own Houses, under the Terror of watchful and malicious Persecutors. Let us put our Souls in their Soul's Stead, and say then, "Would we not think ourselves fit Objects for Pity? And should we not desire the Prayers of the Saints of God?" Think then, Christians, let you and I think with ourselves, who made the *dreadful* and the *happy* Difference? *Happy* for us indeed, but *dreadful* for our Brethren, who endure these Banishments, or heavy Bonds!

*IId Reflection.* Here let us reflect again, *how much more excellent is the Gospel-State, than that of the Levitical Law!* And *how much more happy are Christians in England, than the Jews in Canaan!* Here we have Houses of God near us, Churches assembling

bling in every Town. They were forced to travel three Times a Year to *Jerusalem*, many long and weary Miles: It is true God refreshed them in their Journies, *Psa.* lxxxiv. 5, 6, 7. He gave them Showers of Rain when they were faint or thirsty; but they travelled through *Baca*, that is, *the Valley of Weeping*; many Wants and Inconveniencies attended them, and the Difficulties and Burdens of such a Dispensation, were not light nor little.

We may yet continue this *Reflection*, concerning those who dwell in this great City, and say, *How great is the Privilege the Christians in LONDON enjoy, above those who dwell in distant Villages, or in little solitary Cottages in the Country!* Here we have the Gospel preached in every Street, and Places of Worship at our right Hand, and our left: We dwell, as it were, in the Courts of God; but the poor Villager must travel many a Mile, and perhaps through miry Ways, to attend on the nearest Ministrations of the Word; and in the mean Time the young and the feeble of the Family must be confined at Home. O what Advances in Knowledge and Grace, what Growth in Holiness, and what Approaches to Heaven are to be expected from those who dwell so near the Places of divine Worship, and where the Provisions of Heaven are brought to our very Doors!

*O how*



O how desirable a Thing it is to enjoy all such Circumstances of Life, as give us Liberty to frequent the Courts of God! How much should we value, and how wisely should we improve such a Blessing. Have a Care of neglecting due Seasons of Worship, and be not negligent or infrequent in your Visits to the Courts of God, lest he lay some heavy Restraints upon you, and divide you from his Sanctuary. He has Bands and Chains of various Kinds to cast upon such slothful Professors; Persecution or Sicknefs, Loss of your Limbs, or Loss of your Senses, whereby you may be cut off from the Blessings of his Church; or he may break up House and remove far from you, because you do not visit him; or he may place your Tabernacle afar off from his own, and cut short your Liberty; for it is he which *determines the Bounds of your Habitations*, Acts xvii. 26.

O how unhappily are some Persons overloaded with the Cares of this Life! How are they hurried and overwhelmed in a Tumult of worldly Affairs! And the Business of their daily Calling is too often ready to entrench upon divine Hours and Ordinances. How sore a Distress is it to a pious Christian to be confined and withheld from the Courts of God, by long and tedious Distempers of Body! How painful is it to his Spirit to lye languishing and faint on a Bed of Sicknefs,

while others are made to drink of the River of Pleasure, and refreshing Streams of the Sanctuary! They are sorrowful, while others are made *joyful in the House of Prayer*. They are tasting the Wormwood and the Gall, while we feed on the pleasant Things of *the House of God*, and are *satisfied with the Goodness of his holy Temple*.

And thus I dismiss the *second* Sense of the Words, which probably was the precise Meaning and chief Design of the Psalmist himself, considering the Dispensation under which he lived.

But when in the Times of the New Testament, we apply the Language of the *Jewish* Prophets to the State and Institutions of the Gospel, we have Encouragement enough from the Example of *Christ* and his Apostles, to extend and further enlarge the Meaning of those antient Phrases beyond the literal and *Jewish* Sense, and thus accommodate them to *Christian* Affairs.

The *third* Sense of the Text therefore, when enlarged and explained to Evangelical Purposes, may be this.

*Approaching to God*, in the Style of the Gospel signifies, either our *being brought nigh* to God, and reconciled to him by the Blood of *Christ*, and the Grace of the holy *Spirit*, as in Eph. ii. 13, 18. *In Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were afar off are made nigh,--- and have Access by one Spirit to the Father.*

Or

Or else it means our *drawing nigh to God* in Spirit and in Truth, in Prayer or holy Meditation, &c. So Heb. x. 21, 22. *Having such an high Priest over the House of God, let us draw near with a true Heart.*

*Dwelling in the Courts of God*, may signify an *Union to the Church of God*, which is his spiritual House, upon a solemn Profession of his Gospel, and a visible allowed *Right to all the Privileges and Ordinances thereof*. The Church is the *House of the living God*, 1 Tim. iii. 15. He dwells no longer in *Temples made with Hands*, nor confines his special Presence to any single Spot of Ground, or any material Building: The Assemblies of his Saints are *his Courts*, his dwelling Places; *where two or three are gathered together in his Name, there is Christ in the Midst of them*, Matt. xviii. 20. Every particular Church of Christ, as well as the Church Catholic, or Universal, is a *holy Temple of the Lord, built up for an Habitation of God through the Spirit*, Ephes. ii. 20, 21.

Now surely, if the Men of *Israel* had a Blessing pronounced upon them in my Text, whose Habitation was near to that *material Sanctuary*, we may with equal Assurance, and with much greater Delight say, *Blessed is the Man, O Lord, whom thou chooshest and causest to draw near unto thee, that he may dwell in thy House*, in the Sense of the New

Testament; that he may be *added to thy Church*, Acts ii. 47. That *he may be joined to the Disciples*, Acts ix. 26. That he may *be received in the Lord*, Phil. ii. 29. That he may be united to the Christian Assemblies, and become a Member of the Church of *Christ*.

Let us again consider the *Hebrew Expression*, חֲזַרְךָ יֵשֶׁן, *that he may dwell in thy Courts*, which may with more Exactness and Propriety be rendered, *he shall or will dwell*, &c. and then the Verse will sound thus, *Blessed is the Man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee; he shall dwell in thy Courts*, as a promised Privilege; or he *will do it* as a voluntary and delightful Practice; in which latter Sense, the Words will afford this *Doctrine*.

Doct. *He that is caused in a spiritual Manner to approach or draw near to God, will have a Desire to dwell in the House of God, that is, to be united to his Church.*

He who has tasted that the Lord is gracious, and is brought near to God by the atoning Blood of *Christ*, and the sanctifying Influences of the holy Spirit, will desire to be a visible *Fellow-Citizen with the Saints*, and to become one of the Household. He who has frequented the Courts of God, attending on the Worship of the Church, and has felt the special Presence of God there, convincing, converting, and comforting his Soul,



Soul, will be glad to dwell there, and to join himself to the Church, as a Part or Member of it, and that for these Reasons following.

Ist Reason. *Because he finds so much Delight in approaching near to God, that he desires still to be nearer.* He feels that *Nearness God is Happiness*; and he cannot have too much of that; he cannot be too near his chief Good, and his Soul's Delight. When he has come up to the House of God, and only paid a Visit there, he tasted so much Sweetness in this Visit, that he cannot satisfy himself to be a mere Visitant, where he may be an Inhabitant; he would dwell where God dwells, and be always with him.

God himself, in infinite Condescension, makes a Visit to Families, and to Closets, where Prayer is performed, and comforts praying Souls. But God dwells in *Zion, this is his Rest for ever, for he has desired it*, Psal. cxxxii. 13, 14. Therefore holy Souls would dwell there also. *David* would have the Ark brought to *Zion*, that he might dwell with God: And he often longed to *dwell in God's House*, Psal. xxvii. 4. *Peter* was near God on the holy Mount, and he was immediately for *making Tabernacles*, and dwelling there, *Luke* ix. 33.

He that has drawn near to God in Worship, enjoys so much Pleasure in *common*

*Ordinances*, that he breaths after *special ones*: With God's Invitations he is pleased, and perswaded to come, and he would fain tast the Entertainment. When *Christ* by his Messengers speaks in general to Mankind, he finds a Sweetness in the Voice, he longs therefore to have *Christ* speak particularly to him as a Believer and a Friend. When *Christ* publishes Love to the World, it is pleasant to hear it: But he longs to hear him say to his own Soul, *My Beloved*, He has heard *Wisdom* inviting the Sons of Men to her Feast. *Prov. ix. 5. Come eat of my Bread, and drink of the Wine which I have mingled.* He has tasted of these Provisions in the *Spiritual Sense* of them, and he would partake thereof in all the *sensible Emblems* too.

He is well pleased with the Covenant of Grace, and he agrees to it heartily; he would therefore set his own Seal to it, and receive a Seal from God. He that has a true Relish of divine Privileges, will long after their Increase and Enlargement; he that has felt any Thing of Heaven, will get as near it as possible here on Earth.

Now are these the Breathings of our Souls? Have we ever found such divine Delight in approaching to God, as makes us long after greater Degrees of Nearness to him? We have Reason to doubt, whether our Hearts ever drew near to God in the

*common*

*common* Institutions of his Worship, such as *Prayer, Reading, and bearing the Word*, if we have no Appetite to the *special* Entertainments of his House, and the *Provisions of his holy Table*. We may justly question, whether our Souls are brought near to God at all, if we have no Desire to dwell with him.

*IId Reason.* *He that feels Grace begun in his Heart by approaching to God, will be ever pursuing those Methods whereby it may be carried on.* The very Word *οικοδομῆν*, or *Edification*, which is used in several Places of the New Testament to signify the *Growth of Grace*, does properly mean *building up*, and seems to have a special Reference to the *House of God*, that spiritual *Building* to which every true Christian should belong, and that in a visible Manner too. He that was convinced of Sin and of Righteousness, and was led into the glorious Light of the Gospel, by drawing near to God in publick Worship, when he was before blind and ignorant, will surely seek a greater Nearness to God, that he may ensure divine Illuminations, and dwell always in the Light. He that was sanctified and made a new Creature, by approaching to God in the common Ministrations of his Temple, will lay himself under all the special Advantages that the Temple is furnished with, to maintain his new Nature, and increase in Holiness. The

Communi-

Communion of the Saints, and the Fellowship of a Church, is an appointed Means for the Increase of Grace, and Fruitfulness in every good Work, *Psal. xcii. 13, 14. Those that be planted in the House of the Lord, shall flourish in the Courts of our God; they shall still bring forth Fruit in old Age, they shall be fat and flourishing.* And I think I may pronounce this Truth boldly, *That Soul has nothing of true Religion or Piety begun, who is perfectly contented with any little and low Degrees of it, and does not desire its Increase.*

The Christian who has found God in his Sanctuary according to his Word, longs to be *satisfied with more of his special Goodness.* You may read his Encouragements in the Words of the Prophet, *Isa. lv. 3, 11.* compared with *Chap. lvi. 4, 5, 6, 7.* When the Lord said to him in the publick Ministry, *Incline your Ear and come unto me, hear and your Soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting Covenant with you;* he heard the Invitation of Mercy, and he entered into the Covenant of the Lord, and he begun to taste his Grace: *He came, he heard, and his Soul lives.* He has found *the Word of God accomplishing his good Pleasure, and prospered thus far in the Thing for which it was sent:* Therefore he *joins himself to the Lord, and takes up his Place in his House, and takes hold on his Covenant* in a publick Profession; he hopes now he is *brought to God's holy Mountain,*



*Mountain, that he shall be made joyful in his House of Prayer.*

He that has found the Accomplishment of some Promises, would put his Soul directly under the Influence of all of them. He has Faith, and believes that *God is faithful*, and will fulfil all his Relations; he has trusted in several of the Relations which God has assumed, and found them already fulfilled, as a *faithful Creator, Preserver, Redemer, &c.* now he would put himself under his Care as a *Father of the Family*, and a *Master of the House*, as the *King of his Church*; and when he enters into *Zion*, or joins himself to a Christian Church, he humbly expects to find those Promises made good, Psal. cxxxii. 15, 16. *I will abundantly bless her Provision; I will satisfy her Poor with Bread. I will also clothe her Priests with Salvation, and her Saints shall shout aloud for Joy.* And Psal. xcii. 13. *Those who are planted in the Courts of God shall flourish and be fruitful there.*

Now it is proper to put this *Question* to our own Souls: Do those of us who are joined in holy Fellowship take Pleasure in our Station in the Church, as it is an appointed Means to increase Grace in us, and to promote universal Holiness both of Heart and Life? Do we wait upon God in the solemn Ordinances of his Church, with an humble

humble Faith in his Promises, that he will meet and bless us there ?

And as for those of us who have not yet taken up our Places in the House of God, do we desire that Holiness should increase in us ? And why then do we not breathe after the Blessings of *Sion*, and an Accomplishment of those Promises which God has made to his Church ? What Sign or Evidence can we have that we ever begun to receive Grace from God, if we have no longing Desires of Soul to enjoy greater Degrees of it ? And how can we pretend to long after Growth in Grace, if we refuse the appointed Means of it ?

III<sup>d</sup> Reason. *He that is caused to draw near to God in publick Worship, finds his Soul softened by the Approaches of divine Grace, and feels the awful Impression of divine Commands to perform social Worship.* He reads his Duty plain by the *Light of Nature*, that there ought to be religious Societies, and publick Honour paid to God : He reads it yet plainer in the *Word of Scripture*, that the *original* Christians were wont to form themselves into Churches, or sacred Societies, to celebrate the Institutions of their Lord, and are required by the Apostle not to forsake these Assemblies : His Conscience feels the *divine Authority*, and he cannot resist *plain Duty*.

It

It would be too large here to lay down half *the Reasons of Church-Fellowship*, as a Duty incumbent on those that have tasted of the Grace of God ; it may be proved in a typical Way at least, from the *Practice of the Jews*, and the Church under the Old Testament, in their publick and solemn covenanting with God : It may be further evidenced by the many Prophecies and Promises concerning *Zion*, some of which have a Reference to New-Testament Times, and the Assemblies of the Saints under the Dispensation of the Gospel : It may be inferred from the *Directions of our Lord Jesus Christ*, concerning the Discipline of a Church, as well as from the positive *Institution of the Lord's Supper*, which must not be celebrated but in a Christian Assembly : It may be argued from the many *Counsels and Directions* which Saint Paul has given concerning various *Offices*, and *Forms of Order and Government*, which can have no Place, but in a particular Church : The *great Designs and Ends of Church-Fellowship*, with Regard to the publick Honour of God, the Glory of *Christ*, and the spiritual Benefit of Men, are sufficient Proofs of this Duty : And all these Arguments are established and confirmed by *the Practice of the Apostles*, and the *primitive Converts*.

Now I say, a Soul that has approached unto God in *divine Ordinances*, will obey  
*divine*

*divine Commands* : He that tastes *sacred Pleasure*, will learn *sacred Duty*. He that has received *divine Mercy*, will reverence *divine Authority*. So the Saints in 2 Cor. viii. 5. *They gave their own selves first to the Lord, and then* resigned themselves to the Directions and Commands of the Apostles, *according to the Will of God*.

Now let us see whether we feel the Influence of this Command. Do we, who are joined in holy Communion, continue our Stations in a Church of *Christ*, from the Authority of a divine Institution, and Love to the Ordinance? Or is it because we cannot without Difficulty or Shame *break the Bonds of Christ*, and *cast his Cords from us*? And let us all examine by this Rule, whether we truly approach unto God in Ordinances, or no. Have we been melted by divine Love into a Compliance with all the Institutions of God? Or can we easily content ourselves to make a mere common Profession, without ever subjecting ourselves to the Ordinances of God's House? If you believe the special Solemnities of the Church to be a divine Appointment, and yet have no Thought or Desire tending that Way, you will have much ado to prove that you are sincere in any Part of Worship.

IVth Reason. *He that truly draws near to God, finds so much Satisfaction in it, that*  
he



*he loves to lay himself under more and stronger Engagements to abide near to him. Those that delight in seeking the Lord their God, will not only ask the Way to Zion with their Faces thitherward, but they will also agree together and say, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual Covenant that shall not be forgotten, Jer. l. 4, 5. In a solemn Manner they will give themselves up to the Lord in the Face of his Church. They take Pleasure to lay Bonds on their Souls to walk closely with God; and they believe, and rejoice that the great God engages himself at the same Time to walk with them, according to his ancient Promise, Lev. xxvi. 3, 12. If ye walk in my Statutes, and keep my Commandments and do them, I will walk among you, and will be your God; and ye shall be my People.*

Besides, a Person that is truly brought near to God by *Jesus Christ*, loves to put himself under the Watch and Care of *Christ*, and that in the most express and sensible Manner, by coming into his House. He takes up his Place there, that he may be guarded from those Temptations, whereby the World might allure him to depart from God again. He gives himself up to the Care and Watchfulness of the Pastor, whose Business it is *to watch over Souls*: He subjects himself to the watchful Eye and Care  
of

of all his Brethren and Fellow-Christians in the Church, that they may be as Guards and Assistants to him in his holy Work. He thinks he can never lay himself under too many Obligations to the Lord; and he desires that the Vows of God may ever abide upon him, that his Soul may be kept from all Iniquity, and from wandering into forbidden Ways.

Shall I intreat you now to enquire whether this be the Temper of your Hearts? Have you found so much Pleasure in approaching God, and are you so fully persuaded that your Happiness consists in it, that you are desirous to bind yourselves in the strongest Manner to abide with God? Or do you think you have too many Bonds upon you already? And is it for that Reason you abstain from the Fellowship of a Church, lest ye should be tied too fast to Religion, and have too many Eyes and Guards upon you? It is a dangerous Sign that you have never been truly brought near to God, if you are willing to live at a looser Rate, and are afraid of too many Engagements to Holiness.

Vth Reason. *He that draws near to God in Worship, and enjoys the Sweetness of the Ordinances of Christ, will endeavour to maintain his publick Honour in the World.* It is by such a publick Profession, *Christ* is honoured

noured among Men, and in his House are his Ordinances celebrated. Now should Christians refuse this Duty, where would be a Church to bear up the holy Name of *Christ* in this sinful World? Where would be a House of God for Ordinances to be administered in? It is therefore out of Love to the Ordinances where his Soul has approached nigh to God, and out of Love to *Christ*, to support his Glory, and confess him among Men, that such a Person will *dwell in the Courts*, in the House of the Lord, and give up his Name to *Christ* in the Fellowship of his Church.

And what can our Consciences answer now to such an Enquiry as this? What Concern have we for the publick Honour of *Christ*? Can we pretend to have tasted of his Grace, and have no Regard for his Glory? Do we plead his Name before God as our only Hope, and are we unwilling to confess his Name before Men? Are there none of you in this Assembly, who hope you are brought *near to God by the Blood of Christ*, and yet delay and refuse to give this publick Honour to him in the World? What would become of the Profession of the Name and Glory of *Christ* among Men, if all were of your Mind, and took no more Care to maintain it than you do? Where would any Church of *Christ* be found? Where would the special Ordinances of the

Gospel be administered? or any such Thing as the publick Communion of the Saints? If all were so negligent in this Matter as you are, Churches would be lost, and the Lord's Supper quite forgotten; though our Lord appointed it to continue *till he come*.

Vith Reason. *He that is brought near to God, and united to Christ, will love to look like one that is near God, like a Member of Christ, and one of the Body.* He that is of the Family of the faithful, delights to appear like one of *Christ's* Household, and therefore will dwell in his House. Gospel visible Churches are Types of the invisible: And a true Christian is not ashamed to own his Relation to the Church above, by his Communion with the Church on Earth.

It is true, a Person may be a Child of God in Secret, and of the Household of *Christ*, and yet may not at present have taken up his Place in the Family, nor dwell in the House of God, nor be joined to any visible Church; but then such Persons look like Strangers, like the Children of this World, for they dwell with them in the visible Kingdom of *Satan*: Now true Christians would, or should look like themselves, and not appear like *Foreigners and Strangers*, but as *Fellow Citizens with the Saints*, Eph. ii. 19.

I confess there may be some Seasons and Circumstances, which may not only indulge,



dulge, but even oblige Christians to conceal their Character and Profession. Piety and Prudence agree well together; and we are not to expose ourselves, nor our sacred Things, to a cruel and scoffing Age, without an apparent Call of *Christ*. *Pearls must not be cast before Swine, lest they trample them under their Feet, and turn again and tear us.* But remember, my Friends, that this can never be an Excuse for a constant and an universal Neglect of the Profession of *Christ*, and Communion with his Churches: And doubtless the Guilt of such a Neglect is more heinous in a Day of Liberty, and when there is the least Temptation and Danger.

VIIth Reason. *He that approaches to God the Father, and holds Communion with him, loves to be near the Children, and to hold Communion with the Saints; for he that loves God, must love his Brother also,* 1 John iv. 21. And he must shew his Love by delighting in their Company, and dwelling with them, in the House of their common Father. He must and will hold a visible Fellowship with them, as he hopes he has a Share in their invisible Blessings. All their Infirmities and their Follies do not disgust him half so much, as the Image of God in them gives him Pleasure: He loves to be with them, for *God* is with them; and he longs to be one of them, for they are one with *Christ*, uni-

ted to him in one *Spirit*. There is a more intimate Freedom in holy Conversation among the Inhabitants of one House, among the Members of a Christian Church. They grow into an inward Acquaintance: There is an opening their Bosoms and their Hearts to their Brethren, and a sacred Friendship in spiritual Affairs. See what affectionate Intimacy *David* expresses, and what kind Things he speaks concerning a Fellow-Member of the *Jewish* Church, though he indeed proved a false one, Psal. lv. 13, 14. *Thou my equal, my Guide, and mine Acquaintance; We took sweet Counsel together, and walked unto the House of God in Company:* And Fellow-Christians in the same Society do, or should maintain such a pious Amity.

Surely we have but poor Evidences that our Souls approach to God in his Worship, if we have mean Thoughts of his Family, and despise his Children, as though they were not worthy to be one with us, or we ashamed to be one with them. Will God, the glorious and the holy dwell amongst them, and are they too despicable and unworthy to have our Company? Let us ask our own Hearts, if we are related to God by Adoption, and become his Children, why do we not join ourselves to the Family, and hold Communion with our Brethren?

## R E F L E C T I O N I.

What further *Remarks* shall we make now, at last, upon this Doctrine, and this Discourse? Surely *they teach us to make a severe Reflection upon ourselves and our Conduct; if we find no Desire to dwell in the House of God, no Breathings of Soul after the Fellowship of Saints, and the special Ordinances of the Church of Christ.* Either we labor under some Mistake, some Ignorance of Duty; or we are under the Power of some present Temptation; or else our fancied Approaches to God are but Deceits and Delusions. Observe my Words, I cannot say this is the Case of *all that are not* joined to the Disciples, and added to the visible Church; but this must be the Case of *all that have no Desires of it.* They that have no Inclination to get nearer to God than they are, have a just Reason to think they were never brought near him.

## R E F L E C T I O N II.

*There are surely some sensible Defects or Corruptions in that Church, or there is a Decay of Religion in its Members, where Church-Fellowship is not still esteemed a Pleasure and a Privilege.* Where holy Communion is an insipid and tasteless Thing, there must

be some Degrees of Distance and Estrangement between God and his People; either God is in some Measure withdrawn from that Church, where Saints delight not in their publick Assemblies and Ordinances, or he is withdrawn from our Souls, if we take not Delight therein; for where God dwells among his Saints, Pleasure will dwell too. It is the Presence of God makes Heaven, where Pleasures are grown up to their full Perfection.

Let us ask our Souls, whether we are not decaying Christians? Did we not use to come up to the House of God with Joy, and worship together with Delight? And that perhaps in Times of Difficulty too, as well as in Days of greater Liberty? What a blessed Frame of Spirit was *David* in, *Psal.* xlii. 4? And surely we have felt the same sacred Pleasure too, *when we went up*, as it were, *in Multitudes to the House of God, with the Voice of Joy and Praise*. Is it thus with us at present? Or have we lost the Sense and Savour of those Days? Where's that holy Desire, that impatient Longing and Thirsting after God, which once appeared among us? Our Dwelling in the House of the Lord, has perhaps made the *good Things of his House* familiar, common and contemptible. O let us strive and labour, and pray for recovering Grace.

Decays



Decays will grow upon us, and separate us farther from God, and from the delightful Sense of his Favour, unless we are watchful, and repent and renew our first Love.

*T H E   E N D .*





A


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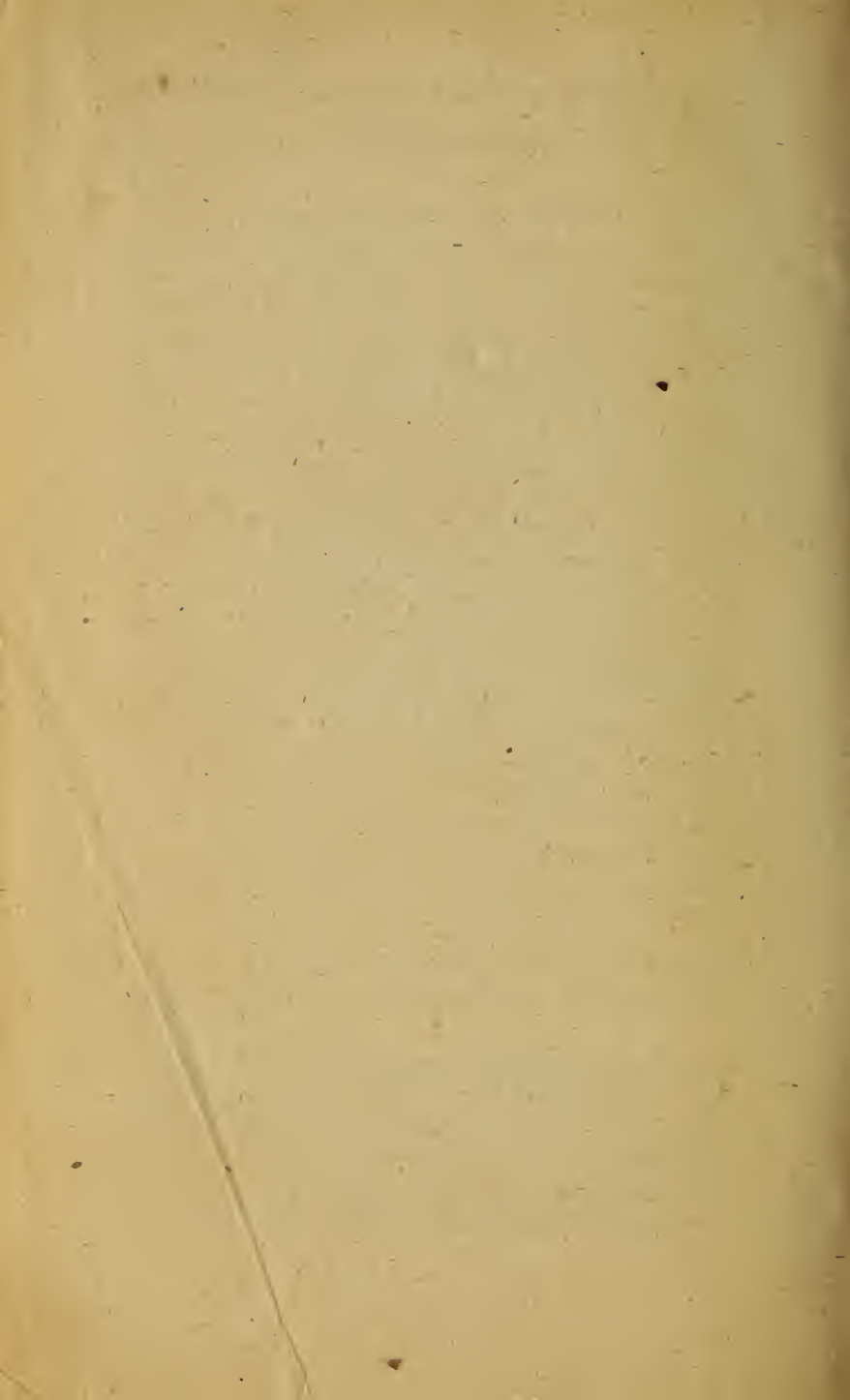
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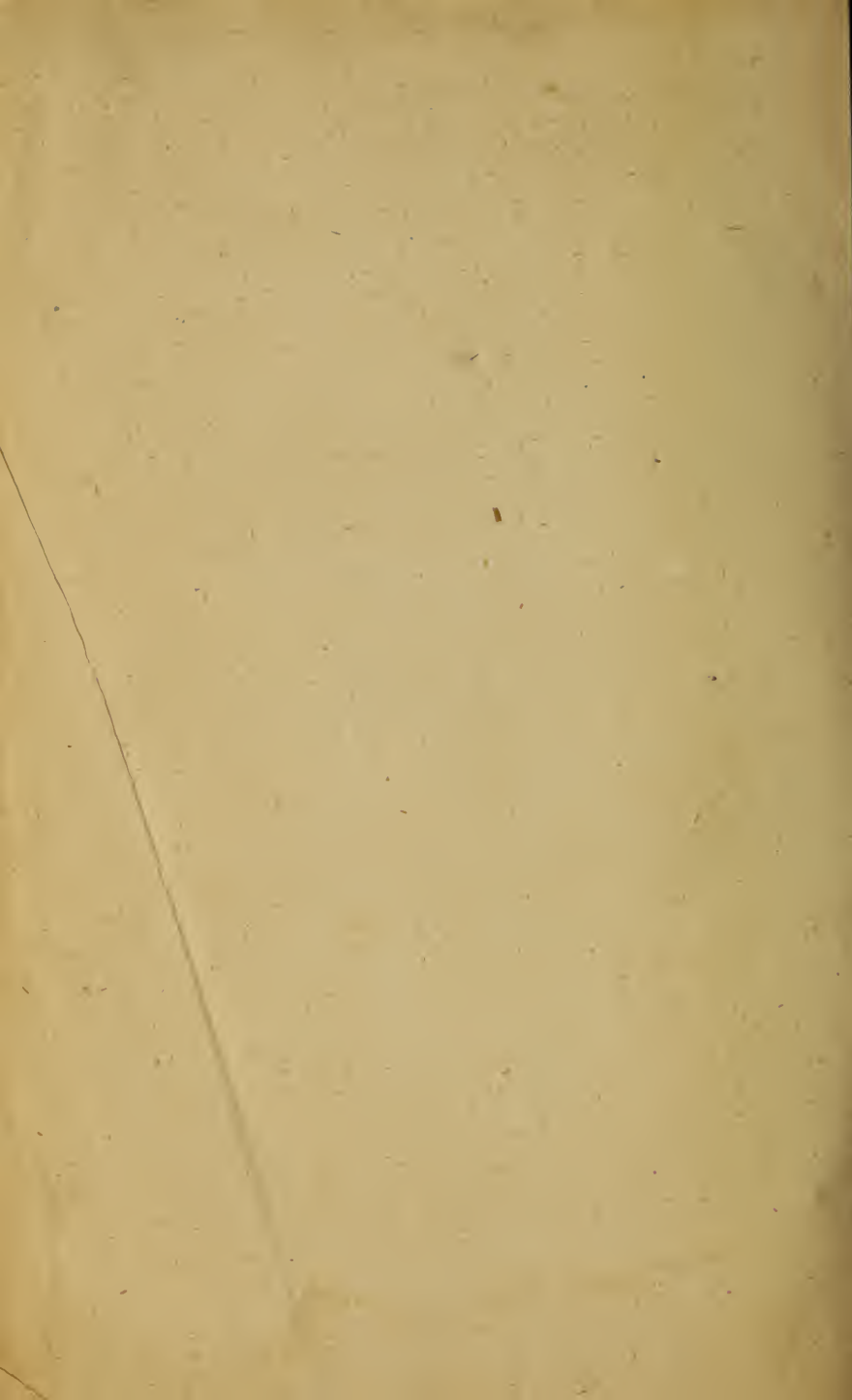
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